TROUSERS OF TAFFETA

BY MARGARET WILSON

TROUSERS OF TAFFETA

TROUSERS OF TAFFETA

A Novel of the Child Mothers of India

BY

MARGARET WILSON

Author of
"THE ABLE McLAUGHLINS"
Harper Prize Novel—1923

NEW YORK AND LONDON
Harper & Brothers Publishers
1929

TROUSERS OF TAFFETA
COPYRIGHT, 1929, BY HARPER & BROTHERS
PRINTED IN THE UNITED STATES
FIRST EDITION
G-D

TROUSERS OF TAFFETA

TROUSERS OF TAFFETA

FORTY-EIGHT hours north of Bombay I stood looking eagerly out of the train window. I could see only, close against the track, a wall of rank swamp grass and willow. But—"Now!" said my companion. "We're just there!" And at that moment, no more wall, but under a mighty scintillating high heaven a great distance of gray sand stretching away to the purple foothills of the Himalayas, where everlasting snows were shimmering pink in the sunset. The train was hurrying over a mile and a half of empty riverbed and drawing near to a stream flowing deep and green against a rich old brick wall. Beyond that wall, flat roofed palaces rose, square tower against square tower, veranda above veranda, through a haze of poet-blue smoke rising from the evening's cooking. And nearer me I saw that this wall was screening from the street beyond it, stairs leading down into the river's water. And on those stairs under great languid branches of overhanging trees naked women were bathing, and some wetly draped were lifting filled waterpots of brass to their heads. This I saw as the train was leaving the bridge and drawing into the city. And I saw crowded streets above which very high up in the air

great gnarled branches of sheshem trees on either side were meeting in cathedral arches. And the streets of that city were pure gold.

The doctor says she met me at the station and drove me home in her cart. But of her that day I remember nothing. For of course there are no streets of pure gold, and I was driving down one of them. Into that lofty nave shafts of gold were slanting down over me, making all the quivering little sheshem leaves shine like flowing copper, lighting into glory clouds of dust kicked up by laden donkeys and flocks of milk-goats. From a thousand such afternoons' experience I know now that through that glow, black-bearded Sikh soldiers, khaki-clad, with scarlet ephod-shaped turbans half a yard high, were leering along, swinging canes; gaunt farmers were stalking homeward, their rags of indigo-blue skirts flapping about their brown legs; vociferous schoolboys in ink-spotted and dingy white were quarreling over the cricket games they were returning from; nearly naked grass-cuts were bargaining at the tonga-stand over the small hay-stacks they let fall from their heads; young bloods of the town in full and immaculate white raiment were throwing coins at leprous, whining beggars; fathers of families hurrying to catch trains, their arms full of tin trunks and babies, were turning their heads to keep an eye on the bewildered and veiled women who shuffled along behind them; Englishmen were riding by on strange long-legged horses; voluminously trousered and hairy Pathans

were shrieking outlandish curses at the strings of nose-tied camels that refused to turn out of their way. I heard men cry out, suddenly stung into wailing song, lambs bleating for their mothers, peddlers hawking ice-cream wrapped in banyan leaves. All at once where a tree was missing from the row the sunlight shot down through the dust in shafts against the wall of a house and bounded back in waves impossibly purple gold. Further on, instead of contiguous houses, were cabin-like piles of pine logs whose hurling, crashing journey down the flooded river from their Himalayan birthplace to the railway had intensified their fragrance—the only familiar one in all that spicy Babel. Beyond them I saw a hedged garden of roses grown for attar, bounded on the further side by banana trees whose leaves flapped raggedly against a mauve horizon. Then we came to a lemon hedge trimmed high above a brick wall, and a gate. That gate I remember because when we drove in through it, on a gravel driveway outlined with pots of chrysanthemums, beyond a dusty tennis court, on a brick wall a peacock with spread tail was preening in an amethyst light. We must have driven up to the brick bungalow, and on the veranda had tea. But of my reception I recall only the jeweled peacock. I knew as I looked that I was drunk with color, but I had no way of knowing how long it would be before I should again be content with sobriety.

That evening the doctor herself took me up to my room. It was larger than some of the wheat fields

that I had seen that day from the train. It was distempered a relentless blue. It was furnished with six pairs of crude pine doors, a rush matting, a struggling fire in a grate—by this time the sun had set—in one corner a pine dressing-table with a small mirror, and in another a tape-strung cot. I took the little kerosene lamp from the doctor. I was alone. I looked around me. I had, of course, no experience of rooms which must be kept closely shut against heat from sunrise to sunset for five months of the year. In that great cave of a room smelling of kerosene, I shivered. How many miles, how many thousands of miles, to electricity, to a warmed house and a place to live, I wondered. I looked about the darkness and shut my eyes. And then I saw a peacock dancing in a jeweled light, and I was content. That was the way it always was, in the City of Taffeta Trousers, for every kerosene lamp, a sacred peacock—for those who shut their eyes resolutely.

The doctor and I slept on the veranda in front of her room, that night, under blankets, or rather, we renewed our acquaintance there. But we must have slept, for I awoke—and beyond the cathedral trees I saw the dawn come up like thunder, as it does in Mandalay. Exactly like thunder it came up, in rolling, rising clouds of copper and dull gold, reddening, mounting, overflowing, outtopping one another. I needed a dawn like that to sustain me through my first Panjabi lesson, from which I limply emerged some hours later, as I have emerged some

thousands of times since, convinced that I should never know that living and unwritten language. I stood staring from the safety of the veranda, out at the mid-morning light in the garden. Had I supposed that I had always lived in sunshine? I was beginning to feel that I had never seen it before. Between the great trees and myself there seemed to be not just air, not merely space, but violent, sheer light flowing, shining, glowing into sheerer light, always clearer and finer, intolerably sweet and green. I learned that day what a treacherous light it was; such a light that when I turned my back to it too long, I felt my spine from the neck downward being pulled out, steadily, nerve by nerve; a light that, shining upon one's unprotected head a few hours, could relieve one of whatever intelligence one might happen to possess.

The City of Taffeta Trousers, I have sometimes thought, is like that savagely beautiful sunlight—insufferable, incredible, impossible, a condition staggering, like the Great War beyond characterization, a thing not to be held by the power of any adjectives. And yet, somehow, we suffered it gladly, we thanked God sometimes for being there, because of the abundance of the life there, the magnificent pitifulness of the life of its womenfolk. It was our star. It opened its heart to us. Therefore we loved it. It was not a place where it was possible for us to live calmly, on earth. We were exalted usually to heaven, or cast down into hell. And groaning, we would agree with the admirable sailor who says that

the heart of darkness is no place for women. So why, we asked, should darkness be so full of women? But no one wiser than ourselves answered, explaining.

It was, of course, because of the hospital that the city opened its heart to us—opened it at least a very small crack. When I arrived, the doctor had forty beds, nearly always full. She was holding clinics every morning but Sunday, and operating nearly every afternoon. She was trying to train her own staff of nurses, who generally married as soon as they were really useful to her. She was supervising three outlying dispensaries and attempting to regulate the practice of native midwives. She was in charge of a small girls' school, and of those Christian teachers who go from house to house instructing what a young undergraduate of my acquaintance charmingly calls "our air-tight ladies." As soon as possible she turned over to me as much of this work as I, without medical training, was able to do. It seems to me now, as I think of those first years, that I spent them in Indian houses leaning forward, with my mouth open, trying to understand, always straining to understand, what seemed to me incredible. Of course my mouth couldn't often have been open. There were too many flies about.

The doctor, naturally, spent little time in unprofessional visiting. She had never learned thoroughly to understand conversation not medical. So, wise from her own experience, she guarded me fiercely from interruption, and kept me studying as many

hours a day as I could stand. For when she had been new she had had perforce to spend the time, that ought to have been devoted to language study, in curing pain and saving life, since there was no one else about to do it. The originality of her idiom was therefore equaled only by the reverence with which it was heard. "Is the pain before or after, now or then," is a question impressive enough to a sufferer sure that the doctor's magic is going to give relief. Her skill, indeed, was too great to be considered anything but miraculous. "A merciful incarnation," Hindu women called her. And a genial fat low-caste dancing-woman who once enlivened our wards for some time, after deeply pondering the phenomenon of the doctor, remarked devoutly, seeing her hurry past, "Will you consider now the blessing which the prophet Jesus has bestowed upon that woman! She walks so fast that no man in this town can keep up with her. And as she walks, she heals!"

Part of the halo which surrounds the doctor she has achieved. Part of it she inherited from her remarkable predecessor. Every family in the city has its own tales about the "first doctor," and each tale grows with each telling. But this much I have reason to believe is true. She was a Eurasian, the result of a union which probably amused some one for a time, and which certainly involved for its child a lifetime of the contempt of both races. She appeared abruptly years ago at the home of a missionary in another part of the province and asked

to be given lodgings for the night. There was no other place in that Indian town where she could well put up, and so, although the family and all the servants were wretchedly trying to ease one another's fever—it was the season of the summer rains and violent malaria—she was taken in. She began nursing them with an energy and skill which seemed to them heaven-sent. "She was Scotch right through, if she was dark," the son of that house told me once, admiringly. After she had made herself invaluable to them all for months without any explanation of her presence, one morning her husband appeared. "Send him away. Tell him I'll never look at him or speak to him again," she commanded the missionary. And she never did, though the missionary, who had liked the man, urged her as much as he dared. "The day I came here, as the train drew near this station, I found out from a stranger in my compartment that he had another wife, with children," was all the explanation she ever made to them.

She decided, in spite of the family's attempt to discourage her, to go to America with them to study medicine. She had only passage money. "My father says she never argued, or listened to advice. She decided things with a great and sudden determination, and no one could move her," the son has told me. In the United States she worked and starved for years, until she had the best medical education then possible for a woman. Then sud-

denly, alone, sent by a missionary society, she, the snubbed half-caste, appeared in our Moslem city.

According to the women, this is what happened: "She went to the deputy commissioner, the chief sahib. 'I will build a hospital for all suffering women and children. Therefore let the government give me *lakhs* and *lakhs* of rupees,' she commanded. So that official, trembling, opened his great bags of silver, and what she wanted she took, and sent back to her house strings of coolies staggering under the weight of coins they carried for her. 'I'll have that land,' she said, pointing to what was a market garden. So that land she had. 'Build me a wall here!' she said to one contractor. And, 'Build me a wall there!' she said to another. And they built. And she said to a man, 'Bring me beams for my roof!' And he brought poor beams, and he died. Yes, . . . I didn't say she killed him. I said, 'He brought poor beams, and he died.' The whole town knows it. And the workmen feared, and built hastily, never even stopping to smoke their water pipes. Men feared her, but not children. All that they did in front of her she saw, and all that they did behind her. And she was as big as ten men—this big." This is invariably measured by arms stretched out as far as possible sideways. "And when the walls were half done, she saw a coolie peeking through a temporary screen at her first veiled patients. And him she seized by the arm and beat with a riding-whip, so that they heard him howling from the Ali Shah Mosque to the shrine of

the Persian dervish. After that no man dared joke about a woman's hospital. And whoever was sick, no matter what the disease, she healed her. No one ever died in the first doctor's time. It wasn't so much the medicine that she gave you, as the way she patted you on the arm and called you daughter. And when the walls were up she began planting the garden. You won't believe it, but she used to put little plants in the ground with her own hands, as if she had no servants. And she said to them, 'Grow for the babies who have to take sour doses.' So they grew. Yes. And when the hospital was opened, all ready, few came, at first. So she used to go through the streets, at evening, when the men were at home. Into every house she went, and whenever she saw a suffering baby, she said, 'Send the mother and the child to me tomorrow.' And the men would say, 'It is not our custom to let our women go to public places.' And if they refused long, she would put her hand on their arm and say, 'Now don't be silly!' She always carried that riding-whip, and she was as big as ten men—this big! So the hospital was full of the sick and the dying. And they all went back home leaping and running and blessing her. Yes. No one ever died in those days."

This last they say reproachfully, so that we have to realize that we are altogether lesser folk. People do die in our time. We carry no riding-whips and command no government treasures. We have taken no land and laid it out foot by foot perfectly, nor

ordered any institution to rise. She planned it all with consummate skill. The point of the triangle formed by the two wide shaded streets she set apart for the doctor's bungalow. This she planted with orange trees and grapefruit. She hedged it beautifully from the roads, crowded always like bazaars; along the drive she set out hardy tea-roses, and along the little ditches that carry water from the Persian wheel well to the fruit trees she planted white narcissus for Christmas, roses and violets and iris for the spring, and chrysanthemums by the dozen for the autumn. She draped the verandas with Maréchal Niels and honeysuckle, and she hid the servants' houses behind rows of low-growing fig trees with a path in front of them leading to the hospital through a little gate.

On the other side of the hospital compound there is another gate, which opens not into men's busy streets, but into a prudent narrow alley and a network of little streets used by only those who live in the respectable houses along them, and by our entirely veiled and discreet patients. That gate is shaded by an old bougainvillæa vine which has been coaxed on a pergola almost up to the brick bungalow where the daily clinics are held. The first doctor filled this compound with the trees that Indians especially like, and jasmine vines whose starry blossoms the waiting patients thread into their earrings on hot summer mornings, and true roses—little old-fashioned fragrant things which Indian women value far more highly than what they call imitations—

that is, western hybrids. Although there are never flowers in the bungalow compound in the very hot weather, and indeed very few in that part of the province, yet in the hospital compound petunias, defying the heat, persist until autumn. I suppose the first doctor commanded them to flourish, and they haven't forgotten.

"When she planted those orange trees," our old cook has told me more than once, "she said to me, 'I indeed plant them. But others will eat the fruit from them that you will carry to the table.' "

And suddenly, in the fullness of her passionate service, she died sleeping.

"In this city there has been no mourning like that one," they still say to me. Her body lay in state in what is now the doctor's bedroom, and all day long weeping women filed up and down the stairs, veiled or unveiled, rajah's wives and pariahs. Two years ago a woman answered me when I asked her if she literally never went out of her house: "Oh, yes! I went out once. They let us all go to the doctor's mourning." That day the wide road in front of the house was full of men sitting bareheaded in the dust, who rose and followed the body to the English cemetery. Yes, in death she got the recognition she had all her life longed for—she was buried among the English. In that churchyard there lie scores of sahibs under twenty-five, perhaps hundreds, who died, most of them, in the 'fifties and 'sixties. "In the twentieth year of his age—cholera." . . . "Died of plague,

age twenty-two." . . . "Sunstroke . . . age twenty-three." . . . "Fever . . . twenty-two," the dearly loved son of So-and-so of such and such a place in England—you can read the laconic records of those younger sons for an hour. The doctor's epitaph is shorter than the others—"She hath done what she could," the stone says.

The hospital was shut for a while, then, until a city of women crowded through the gates to see the new doctor. A bitter disappointment she was to them, they have told me, laughing over their misunderstanding. They seem to have imagined that she was to be an exact duplicate of the first one, and, behold! although she was clearly no half-caste, she was not nearly as large as ten men, scarcely as large as one, and her reddish-brown hair, instead of being pulled back with the correct tightness, curled incorrigibly loose and soft about her face. She was young. She wore glasses over her eyes. She was unmarried, and discouragingly matter-of-fact. "The first doctor was a flowing river of pity for women. She'd had a husband herself," they say. The only thing about the newcomer that impressed the women was her professional air, and I understand that, for I have seen a certain concentration of interest with which she examines an unusual case bring to her face its utmost charm. She says now that she had great luck that first year. I know that when I arrived, three years later, she had crowded clinics and the approval of the city—although people were occasionally dying.

That was a very long time ago. Sometimes nowadays the doctor and I are undoubtedly the oldest women in the world. The peacock dances still, at times, on our wall, but not often, for we hate peacocks. We would gladly wring the necks of them all if they were not so sacred, and as it is, we instruct the watchman to drive them away when they come screeching about in the green dawns, when another ten minutes' sleep is more precious than an hour of Mandalayan sunrises. Sometimes we despise even the sunrises and would exchange a year of them for one well-bred Western sunrise which knows the value of restraint. And often now we shut our eyes against the great trees which stretch their branches upward yearningly and send them drooping down caressingly, and long for rows of northern elms stiff and upright like the men who walk beneath them. Yet sometimes we still see with determination the evening golden, managing not to remember that its glory, the dust, is but specks of sun-dried sewer filth.

The determination comes to us partly from our friends, the women of the city. We have scores of friends—perhaps it is not exaggeration to say that we have hundreds. I have loved them very much, and they have sometimes rather liked me because I have amused them when otherwise they would have been bored. And that perhaps is enough justification of my presence in that city. And there are houses in the villages round about where they receive me like a daughter. "She has come back to

her father's house," they say, greeting me with a right-shoulder hug, and a left-shoulder hug. And when I come away they give me gifts of sugar cane, or popcorn, or eggs which they can't, themselves, afford to eat. "Should a daughter leave empty-handed?" they ask, when I protest. At such times the city is all pure gold again. For, after all, not many people in the world are worth half a dozen hoarded eggs.

Yes, perhaps we have accomplished something; the doctor certainly has accomplished much. But the city is the same old place, and I say it is brutal, as war, I believe, always is. One sees practically no sign of peace or truce, of trust or understanding, between men and women, between victors and vanquished. The struggle was old when our women fled from the soldiers of Alexander's army camped on the river bank. When Buddha, resting under our banyan trees, sighed over the sorrows of the world, our women flocked out, unafraid for the moment, to worship him. For century after century, with wars and fightings about them, they stripped themselves of their jewels to help their kings defend them from the Moslems, who from Mahmud onward scattered their men and possessed themselves of them. For generations after Timur's horsemen passed, they never ventured out to the river banks to wash their clothes without stationing watchmen on the higher places to warn them against invaders. And during the reign of the Sikhs, bandits once stole a wedding party, bride and bride-

groom, merrymakers and horses, after a fight on the spot where the boys' high school now stands. And no one ever knew certainly what became of the men.

And now the English rule the city and its women come to the hospital wearing their husbands' wealth, unafraid, in bracelets on their arms. But what of that? The great problems have not yet been solved. The trouble with our city is, that here one can never cease thinking of what has always baffled the race. Elsewhere the smug may ignore problem plays and problem novels, but here no one gets away at all from problem reality. In our city, men, to be sure, don't respect women. But, after all, why should they, when women so few places in the world respect men? The philosophers of this civilization used to call women names perhaps mildly uncomplimentary—vipers, for instance, or tongues of hell fire. But what the women said in return about the philosophers has not been recorded, and judging from what my friends of the city say about the present philosophers, I think it perhaps well that it was not. And listening to them year after year, we have had to go on comparing one civilization with another—Indian philosophies with European philosophies, Hindu platitudes with Christian platitudes, Arabian bunk with American bunk, Sanscrit callousness with industrial callousness, the Ganges with the Mississippi, Lahore with London. The result, of course, is that now, unlike most people who have had no experience of Indian life

we cannot dogmatize about it in vaguenesses and in generalities. Obviously, therefore, what follows here is not a treatise about India, nor about the Panjab, nor about the City of Taffeta Trousers, nor about mission hospitals. It is simply a story about a few women and myself, and I wish it to be understood that anyone generalizes from it at his own risk. I do not even say it is true. I say that what I have related, I saw happening, and I have described it as accurately as I could.

One morning as I was going down a familiar street, blinding white with sun and dust, with only one-storied, clay-plastered houses on either side of it, an old servant coming out of a doorway stopped me. She said:

"Please come in and see my mistress. She wants very much to see you."

"Did she say she did?"

"She didn't say so, but I know she does. She has been sitting there crying all the morning."

"What's the trouble?"

"The same old thing! Everyone has got a baby, and she hasn't got one." And the servant shrugged, resigned either to her mistress's sorrow or to her weeping.

I was standing near the curtained doorway, and from inside came the voice of the mourner—of the usually impertinent, lazy, lackadaisical Taj—imploring me to come in.

"*You* crying, Taj, of all people! What have *you* to cry about!"

"I have more to cry about than anybody! Is it true, I want to ask you, do all women go to hell who have no children?"

"You are just letting them make you miserable! I haven't got any children, and I'm not going there —at least, not for that reason!"

"Oh, you!" she remonstrated, shocked. "As if *you* could go there!"

"As to that, opinions differ. And, anyway, you have *had* children. So you're all right. How many children is it you have had?" I asked, to comfort her. She had been speaking with more energy than I had often before heard her use. Energy simply was not a part of her. She could sit perfectly still and do nothing serenely for more hours together than any other woman I have ever seen.

Her courtyard was a tiny square place. She led me into the low sitting-room adjoining it, which, with a still smaller room, constituted her home. It was an apartment in which everything called aloud to its mistress to rise and dust—and called in vain. The Koran text hanging awry was so coated that it was practically the color of the khaki wall and floor. However, the same dust that hid the exhortation from the eyes of the faithful, veiled also the

indiscretions of the gaudy lady on the last year's calendar. I had remarked to Taj once that she was a disgusting creature, but Taj had counseled me not to mind her because she couldn't be seen plainly, anyway. On a shelf up near the ceiling were four cracked but gayly-flowered dinner plates, two cheap green pressed-glass tumblers and a blue one, and some tarnished brass and pewter drinking-cups. One could but conjecture how brightly they might have shone after a good scouring. There was one cot standing on its hind legs up against a wall, and another on all-fours, with the untidy bedding of the household rolled up at one end of it. I began to sit down on the bed, but Taj exerted herself to throw out of her one chair, of very hard and heavy wood, a soiled shirt, a bread-basket with some stale bits in it, and an empty, greasy, tarnished brass cup which was used for hair oil, and insisted on my having the place of honor, grumbling, as she did it, about the uselessness of her servants. And then she seated herself in her place on a bit of cotton carpet, adjusting her soiled and solid bolster against the wall and arranging her veil about her chin, and took up her daily routine of doing nothing—doing nothing but longing.

She had, alas! so little else to do! Her servant prepared her food at a cooking-place in the court-yard, which she from her place against the wall supervised with sallies of drawling good-natured complaint, without troubling to lift her voice. On Fridays she washed her hair, and moved out a bit

from the wall, so that her servant, sitting behind her, could braid her black hair into an intricate network of tiny braids all over the back of her head, so cunningly that until the next Friday, in spite of her veils continually slipping down from it, scarcely a hair could get out of place. As often as she could she inveigled myself, or one of my teachers, into coming to amuse her. She had never the least desire to learn anything. She simply sought relief from blankness. Yet that morning when she had set the chair for me, she reached laboriously up for her small bundle of books from the upper shelf, because once, in the absence of her servant, she had refused to have a lesson because it was too much trouble, she said, to get up and reach for the books, and I had replied, naturally, that in that case it was too much trouble for me to come to her house. Since then, to please me, she had undergone the exertion herself. The books were tied in a discolored bit of bright-red printed cotton, which she loosened gingerly, blowing the dust from each one of them carefully not toward me, slapping them individually against her voluminous trousers, and wiping them on her net veil. And even that morning though her face was red with tears, she fingered them with studious pretense as, in answer to my question, she went on longing more passionately than usual for a baby because I had reminded her of her first one.

"I never had but the one—a daughter," she hiccoughed, sobbing. "That was when I was very young—my first husband. Did I never tell you I

had another husband first? Well, anyway, I had." A sob. "First I lived with him down there in the street of the new mosque, the third house from the corner—you know those houses. I was only thirteen when the child was born." Then she demanded, with a different interest behind her words, "And what does one know at thirteen, Miss Sahib! I was only a child, I tell you, and I hated it—the waiting and the burden—but that was only because I didn't understand, wasn't it? It wasn't my fault, really, because I was too little to appreciate it, and the women used to joke about it because my man was so old. He was so old he died soon, thank God! It wasn't really as if I had known what I was doing, was it, Miss Sahib!"

She wanted me to reassure her that God wasn't cherishing against her the memory of her early sins, and I could do that with a good conscience.

"There was a large walled courtyard down there," she went on, "and the children used to play there by moonlight, and I couldn't run nor climb with them, being heavy-footed, and I cried because I hated it. And I was afraid. I was afraid of him, too. I was glad when it was over. Miss Sahib, I was glad ——"

But she couldn't bring herself to say she had been glad when the child died.

"Besides, I had fever, and they didn't dare to give me water to drink. They gave me oil. I could taste it for years. And one night, a few days after the baby was born—I tell you I was only a

naughty, spoiled child at the time—I crept out of bed and down to the river, thinking I would swim where the girls and the women were having such fun. I was burning with fever. I managed to get down to the steps into the water. It was June and the river was flooding with the melting snow from Cashmere. I sat there with my feet in the icy water. They found me unconscious and carried me back. They say that's why I have never had another! It is my punishment. Do you believe it?"

I said I did not.

"Then he died. I didn't care. I was glad. I went back to my mother. Then afterwards I married *him*."

Her voice had cast off its languor. It practically rang.

"My husband is the best man in the world. Doesn't everybody say he is? He was so good to me! He loved me! And then I understood. I understood it all. I wanted a son for him. I prayed and I waited. I besought the first doctor. I kept getting older and older. I begged him to get another wife. I say to him often, 'Why don't you get a young wife and some children?' But he won't, Miss Sahib! He never will!" She was exulting in that assurance, and yet fresh tears came to her eyes as she added, "And I never shall bear him anything, now."

I said: "Oh, well, don't worry too much about it, Taj. After all, there are other things in the world besides children."

Taj looked at me sharply, in surprise.

"Other things?" she asked. "What other things?"

And well might she ask it, as I immediately realized. For what else could there be for women in that world but children? I had spoken as I did because certainly normal Western women, however intensely maternal they may be, are able to make themselves, if they will to, compensations, of a sort, alleviations, to some degree, for barrenness. But in this place where the climate and the civilization and the religions seldom grant men a respite from desiring women, so they seldom grant women a respite from desiring children. Here frustrated breasts, it seems, can never cease aching, and hungry wombs, instead of succumbing to starvation, cry on always for food. And naturally the causes which make the birth-rate high and increase the rate of infant mortality increase the amount of sterility, and intensify the tragedy of it. It seems sometimes as if intemperate Nature, having frustrated her own purpose, can never temper her remorse. And Taj, studying me, cried:

"Miss Sahib, tell me the truth! For once tell me the truth!" She exhorted me in this manner because so much of what I repeatedly said to her sounded, of necessity, incredible. "Don't you love them? Don't you really love them? The hair soft on their little heads when you stroke them, and the way they kick their sweet little legs! Don't you honestly love them?"

"Of course I love them! I never said I didn't.

Not only their hair and their sweet little legs, either! I often think we love them more wholly than you do—their minds and their development and their growth."

"Their minds and their growth," said Taj, drawling serenely again, "shall be as God decrees. Fate, that is. What can we do with it? You say you love them. But you don't, really. For if you did, you'd get married. Why do you waste the good years of your life, while you are young, on schools and hospitals?" She leaned toward me earnestly again. "Miss Sahib, suppose you cured all the pain in the world, you and the doctor, and made everybody happy, and when you came to die, you had no son—what would it all avail you in the end?"

"On the other hand," I replied, "suppose I had ten sons, and when I came to die I knew they were like the men in this town. What would that avail me?"

"Why," she remonstrated instantly, "that would avail you a great deal. You would have had them to play with!"

"That's the difference between us, I suppose. We've had a lot of scruples pounded into us—a conscience. We were taught not to amuse ourselves with other people's lives. After all, there might be some satisfaction, when you die, in being able to say that at least you haven't inflicted life upon anyone for your own amusement."

But Taj wasn't listening to my nonsense. She

was sympathizing with what must be my secret sorrow.

"It's too bad," she sighed. "You would have had such nice children. You sons would have been beautiful tall sahibs by now if you had been ——" I thought she was about to say, "more sensible," so I said:

"More diligent in my youth? You mustn't be too hard on us, Taj. It takes great skill to marry, in our country—to get just the right father for our children."

"You're just joking!" She was annoyed with me. "You could get married if you wanted to. There are plenty of white men about. Anyone would do. My husband could get you one from the government's office. Why, you know the first sahib has a wife that can't speak a word of Hindustani! And you can say whatever you want to in our language."

"Unfortunately, Hindustani doesn't seem to attract Americans. You can't imagine how perverse they are!"

But she burst out passionately: "You *are* joking! You just joke about it! And I'd give my life for a baby—for even a daughter!"

I made apologies.

"What have I left undone?" she demanded. "Have not I risen at midnight and at the dawn, to pray?" I didn't doubt that with all her laziness she had done that.

"Haven't I fed every whining beggar who sought God's blessing on me?"

I had seen her hand food out past the curtain to many who made their contribution sure by beginning, "God give the mistress of this house sons aplenty! The Most High bestow ten sons upon this woman who helps the hungry!"

"Haven't I gone twice a week to the hospital for fourteen years, until the doctor feels like throwing me out of the clinic every time I mention my desire to her?"

There could be not much doubt about that. At least twice a week, I knew, she bestirred herself to pull out of her little stuffed chest whatever garment she could get hold of by a protruding end and untangle from the others, swaddled herself in her middle-class draperies and veils, and waddled off to the hospital, her sandals plowing along through the ankle-deep dust.

"Miss Sahib, tell me!" she cried. "Tell me now what I can do!" She wasn't leaning against the wall then. She was sitting up, bending toward me, as if in her desperation she was trying to draw magic out of me, the unknown, the incomprehensible. She had extremely large, prominent brown eyes, a small nose and mouth, and a receding little fat double chin. She was probably nearly thirty-five and she was distinctly fat, naturally and fashionably fat, and she was rather fair, and entirely tragic. I felt my inadequacy keenly.

"Never mind," I said. "Don't give up. You can never tell what may happen."

"Of course you would say that. That's your religion! He took down my New Testament from the shelf the other day, having nothing else to do in the heat, and opened it at those words—you know—it opens itself to that place!—where it tells about the angel saying to Zacharias, 'Fear not! Thy wife shalt bear thee a son! Thou shalt have joy and gladness!' He had never read that before. And he said, 'My God! I didn't know Christianity was such a fine religion! What makes people lie about it so? Listen to this!' he cried to me, and he read it to me. Excited he was. Miss Sahib, I heard that the first day I ever went to the hospital! A Bible woman was reading it to some women. I took it for an omen. Besides, I got a New Testament reading-book, to learn to read from, and that book always opens, itself, to that page! But nothing ever comes of it! Nothing comes of anything! It won't be long now," Taj's sobbing came back, echo-wise. "Joy and gladness that woman Elizabeth had ——"

I was right that morning when I told her to go on hoping. For an angel came to her before long—the angel of her annunciation—in a long white clinical apron in the prosaic little examining-room of the hospital, among charts and instruments and apparatus, an angel almost as much surprised as the worshiper, tired long ago of listening to the woman's imaginary symptoms. The doctor said

afterwards that just at first, when she realized that she had good news to tell, she was really very happy for the woman's sake. But in a few minutes she had lost patience with her. Taj went into hysterics. She fell down at the doctor's feet. She kissed her skirt. She kissed her shoes.

"Stop that nonsense! Get up! You mustn't go on this way! You must be calm."

"Calm! Now may God forgive me if I'm ever calm again! Are the dead calm when they rise from their graves, let out in heaven? Are the blind calm when their eyes open to the world? I bless you! I bless you!" she was crying with her arms stretched up to heaven, as the doctor propelled her into her own office, to make her lie down there. She did what she could for her, and went out to her next patient, shutting the door behind her.

Now while the doctor had been performing her unusually angelic task, I, like a customary devil, had been glaring at the municipal street-sweepers to insure that the open drains in the streets outside the walls should attain to a perceptible degree of inoffensiveness. As soon as I had satisfied my nose, I entered the hospital compound by the bougainvillæa's purple door. A swept gravel walk before

me, passing directly along in front of the verandaed bungalow where the clinics were held, led a few steps farther on to the two-storied hospital building that, facing me, appeared to be a pavilion of verandas with Maréchal Niel roses covering the brick columns between the cramped Moorish arches. These two buildings formed two sides of a garden square whose third side was a length of verandas, behind which the operating-rooms were, and whose fourth side was the wall through which I had entered, a wall of pink brick built so high that the men of the two-storied houses across the narrow street, though they climbed to their utmost roof, could not look down into our compound. There had been slime and drains outside, but inside, that morning, there rushed upon me the fragrance of loquat blossom from our garden, and a very overflowing of springtime. The living, nervous transparency of that sunshine was brilliant beyond words. It was an atmosphere that didn't allow one to be unconscious of it, and when I looked through it across to where the mulberry tree by the operating-room was shining in its eager and unique young green, I thrilled with excitement. At once I became aware that something had happened. The mulberry tree didn't explain the fact that whereas the square was usually covered with groups of women sitting down, this morning it was full of women standing up, aroused, alight. In two seconds I realized that, though I hadn't actually seen the comet that had just flashed across their sky, I had

almost seen it. The light of Taj's first joy was still shining on their faces.

The four women who happened to be standing nearest the door pounced upon me.

"The Miss Sahib! Has she heard? Miss Sahib, have you heard the good news? About Taj? About the babu's wife? She hasn't heard! It happened an hour ago, and she hasn't heard it yet! Taj has hope! Before God we are not lying! No! The doctor herself said ——"

Their chorus was interrupted. A fifth woman strode importantly through them, as it were, to me, thrusting them aside. A humble little woman she was, who lived next to Taj and submitted to her patronage—a thin, dark, overbred, underfed, low-spirited person possessed of but one thin bracelet of silver.

"God! what a day!" she ejaculated, gesturing with an outstretched palm. "Let *me* tell the Miss! *I'm* the one who knows about this! I was sitting there, just *there*, on that veranda, waiting my turn to go in for my medicine, for my chance to see the doctor, for the vapors of my legs torment me sorely of late—I was but sitting rubbing my knee for comfort when out of the door comes Taj! She bent down to pick up her *bourqa* from the floor beside me, and when I saw her face I jumped up. 'The Lord protect us!' I said, for I was frightened. 'What's the trouble?' I couldn't understand what she said. She babbled. I asked her more strongly. I thought the doctor had given her a medicine which

had made her drunk. She said, 'Sister—at last—I have hope!' I laughed—God pardon me—for she is old. She said, 'Don't laugh! God has done it! Come with me.' I was struck dumb. My heart fluttered. My tongue stuck. I couldn't say a word. I said, 'God be praised! Oh, God be greatly praised!' I said. She had veiled herself and was calling me to come with her. She was already at the door! 'Wait!' I said. 'I must see the doctor.' Do you understand why she wouldn't wait a moment, Miss Sahib? She wanted to tell her husband. I tried to reason with her, but she would send a boy to his office to tell him she was so ill he must leave his work and run home. I said, 'Let him wait till he comes home this afternoon!' But she said, 'He has waited seventeen years already. Run!' she said to the boy, 'for he will reward you handsomely.' As soon as I saw her safely into her house —she was staggering from excitement—I returned to get my medicine. 'There will be power in the doctor today,' I said to myself."

"Um-m!" said the women. "That's true!" They had been intensifying each ejaculation with tremendous great sighs of unfathomable satisfaction in the story. "Ah, now God be praised!" they sighed. And, "Allah! What mercy on sinners!" "How good is God!" they said. They perceived my incredulity, and gloated over it. "The Miss Sahib doesn't yet believe it! No wonder! I couldn't believe it, myself. Go and ask the doctor. We have already asked her. Hear it from her lips!"

They followed me, chattering and blessing God, to the clinic veranda. Through the open doors I saw the doctor at work in her whitewashed dispensing-room. She was sitting near a table covered with bottles and swabs and basins of water. An outcast woman sitting at her feet was holding securely the kicking legs and the fighting arms of a shrieking baby whose head, turned back, was securely pinioned between the doctor's knees, until, with one motion it seemed to me, she turned the child's right eyelid wrong side out—both eyes were swollen shut—cleansed it with a bit of dripping cotton, shut it up, opened, washed, and closed the other eye, and with a gesture of kindliness gave the sufferer back to its mother's arms. As she reached for a new bit of cotton and called, "Next!" I asked her, lifting my voice above the howls of the babies, speaking in English, which no one about understood, "Is it true that Taj is going to have a baby?"

"Yes it is! Isn't it great!" she called back, smiling. The next baby was being made fast for its ordeal. The doctor was at her work. I stared at her. The doctor, like the atmosphere, never allowed me to get used to her. There she sat, in her screaming, bleeding, exuding environment, among a crowd of women, most of them poor and all of them dirty, in a white uniform that three hours before had been immaculate, unperturbed and good to look at, against a background of crudely stained pine cupboard doors, her very dark auburn-

brown hair waving back prettily from her low forehead, and escaping wherever it could from its control into little ringlets, her cheeks mildly pink from the babies' cryings, her blue eyes bright with interest, and yet characterized not by any of these traits, but altogether by the extraordinary trimness, the exactness of the motions of her perfect hands in their ministering.

But the women, my informers, would give me little time to consider the doctor. "Ha!" they cried. "Now! You believe it now." And they turned to find another ignoramus standing near them. "What! do you mean to say you haven't heard the news?" I came out of the veranda into the dazzling light of the little square, to make my way among the women to the veranda wards. No one spoke of anything but the news. "Ah, thank God! After so long!" "Twenty years, is it? Or thirty?" "Imagine how she must feel to have found hope now!" "It isn't that woman? No! Not that fattish old Taj? Ah, God of Light, what a tale!" Taj was known to more of them, perhaps, than any of the other "hospital haunters," for she had a spicy way of gossiping, and they had been almost sure of finding her in one of our verandas on a Tuesday or a Friday, ready to explain why the postman of a certain street had a black eye, or who had paid for the gold bracelets that some bazaar woman was flaunting before them—anything really interesting of that sort Taj had always been ready to amuse

them with. "To think now of that one being God's Blessed! After forty years to have hope!"

That was what they all called it. Not fear, nor dread, though month by month they saw women dying in childbirth. They didn't speak of it as a way, or a condition, or a delicate matter. It was just *hope*, to them, in the very fullness of meaning the word might have thrust into it—hope of life and salvation. And the thought of it brought to each face its utmost beauty, the tenderness with which very little babies illumine the faces of their mothers. It was that expression that was lighting up the spring morning. As I passed along I was stopped with greetings by group after group of women. I didn't personally know half of them, but they had all suddenly become friends of mine simply by sharing so great an experience with me. And I could tell, merely by looking at them, which of them all were barren, by their eyes filled passionately again in that hour by the lovely sacrificial lust of women.

All of them, barren or fruitful, were making plans.

"I'm going to send today to my brother's wife in Lala Musa," vowed a Pathani, mixing Pushtu with Panjabi. "Three marriages the poor man has made, and not so much as a daughter yet in his house!"

Her friends urged her to be prompt about it. And a down-country cook's wife recalled the days of the first doctor and her frequent miracles.

"My uncle's wife was barren until she submitted to her skill, and she died having four sons and eleven grandsons!"

"Yes!" said a beautiful thin Hindu woman. "You remember the year the long-tailed comet was in the sky, a young wife of our street ——"

And so it went. The in-patients in the veranda wards had all a different air about them, that morning, for it was obvious that after what the doctor had just done, no case was beyond her skill. They seemed to see themselves departing well and strong in a day or two. They consulted me about sending for their menfolk to come to take them home.

As I was coming down the steep stairs from the upper ward, I saw sliding in through the magenta-purple doorway a lady with two servants—a lady who had unveiled impatiently almost before the door had closed behind her. Without circumspection or precaution she had thrown the muslin cape, that had veiled her from head to foot, with one gesture into her servant's arms and stood revealed clothed in fine trousers-like garments, a gleaming white shirt, and a sheer sea-green veil creased still in the folds of its washing. Though she stood for a moment there unconventionally and boldly bare-faced, she was not disreputably so. No one seeing her doubted that she was a great lady, or that she was quite a new sort of great lady. She spied me on the stairs almost at once. She gave a little exclamation of pleasure and, carrying herself very proudly, she came gliding through the crowd toward

me. As one long-absent sister embraces another, so she embraced me, with a stately hug to the right shoulder, and a stately hug to the left. I said:

"Oh, my dear, I'm glad to see you back!" I'm afraid I laughed a little, for her return signified so many things to me. "Is everything—all right?"

She held me at arm's length, the little thing. She had a small, fair face, a thin, hawk-like nose, eyes extremely dark and bright, which had always, unfortunately, great brown circles about them. She cocked her head to one side, and as a keenness flashed at me out of her eyes she retorted, with an amused sniff:

"You refer to my brother, Blessed of God? Yes, he's come to terms, as you see. I said I wouldn't come back until I could come to the hospital when I wanted to. And I didn't! Did I, now? Here I am, and there is nothing wrong with me! I'm not asking for medicine. I came to see you."

Decency seemed to compel me to reprove her at least a bit.

"Your mother has missed you terribly. She's grieved over this a great deal."

"Puhh! Maybe she did. But she didn't grieve enough to make my brother give in, you notice. If she had wanted me back all she had to do was to make him write, saying I could do in his house as I do in my husband's. You can't blame me for it."

"That's true. But still, Nur," I remonstrated because I was thinking of her mother the Rani. The daughter's name in full was Nur-ul-Nissa, Lady of

Light, and she was a light that all but blinded her mother's eyes. She had been born to that most orthodox, conservative, aloof-from-the-world personage soon after her husband's death. And all the days of her widowhood the Rani had considered genealogies and investigated bank accounts to make the best possible marriage for this daughter, the very apple of her eyes. And after all the care and cunning skill she had put into the arrangement, after all the counsel of her wise relatives, the marriage had turned out as badly as possible. She had wanted to get a firm, not to say stern, mother-in-law for the girl whom she knew she had pampered and spoiled. But the chosen mother-in-law, and the father-in-law, too, had died before the marriage had been consummated. And in his city, far from the Rani's eyes, the young groom, coming into his inheritance, naturally did what he pleased with his own. The first thing he did with his young wife was to put her into a day school, into a mission day school, so that the carefully sheltered young girl not only went back and forth in the street every day from her house to the school, but, once there, associated with suspicious characters of all sorts—not only low-caste Indian Christian women with college degrees, and daughters of idolatrous Hindus of the most objectionable new-fangled type, but with the offspring of Moslem women who so far forgot themselves as to speak barefaced at public meetings of women discussing women's rights. I could see the Rani's point of view. But I sympathized, naturally, with the girl. When

first she had told me about her new life, she had said to me that it was as if always she had been hungry for food and had never seen any until she got into that school. She had gone on guzzling the classroom feast of daily lessons like a little glutton.

I have thought that if Nur had been wiser, for the sake of having her sometimes at home the doting Rani would have found some way of compromising with her painful demands. But Nur had to an inordinate degree a young girl's desire to shock her elders. The first time she had come back to visit her mother, while the Rani was casting about in her mind for some way of compromising with her, Nur had taken occasion to remark, gratuitously, casually, to a circle of disapproving aunts and cousins, that she thought her marriage was so happy because she had had a chance to get to know her husband before they were married. If a young American bride of a proper family had said to her mother as she cut the wedding cake, that she had already been living with the groom for a year, she would have caused no more gossip than Nur did by her wicked remark, which had no truth whatever in it. The horrified Rani had felt that the girl was destroying the family honor and must be taken in hand. Nur had felt that her precious new liberty was in jeopardy, and at once, to test the case, she had announced that she was going to our clinic. She had cut her finger off with a great knife, she said, and must go to the hospital to have it bound up. Her brother, the outraged Raja, had retorted that she had pricked herself with a pin

and that she was not to go beyond the women's inner courtyard curtain. Whereupon Nur had written a post-card to her husband—her brother kept a servant to write his letters, not being able to do it well—demanding that he come at once and take her home with him. And in a day or two she had left her mother's home with her husband, declaring that she would never come back—*never*—until her brother agreed to let her do as she pleased. And now she stood triumphantly before me at the foot of the steep stairway, that fine spring morning.

"Anyway, we're all glad to have you back. You must be careful, now that everything is settled peacefully ——"

"Settled!" cried Nur, as if I had accused her of something evil. "Miss Sahib, you don't know them! They are quarreling with me again!"

"Oh, Nur! What have you said now?"

Before she could answer, a friend of mine, coming up, exclaimed:

"Good morning, Miss Sahib! God be with you! Have you heard the news!"

I said that I had, and she congratulated me upon being alive upon such an occasion. I replied with proper devoutness. She was but a common, poorly dressed seller of vegetables from a basket upon her head, but her enthusiasm was so impressive that Nur asked:

"What news?"

"What!" cried the country woman. "You haven't heard!" For once she had advantage of the

great lady, and she recounted in a few graphic words how a prayerful Musulmani who hadn't had a baby for sixty years, now, by the blessing of the Most High upon the doctor's effort, at last had hope.

"God!" cried Nur. "That's interesting! But is it true?" She turned to me with a quick, bird-like motion of her head. I never saw eyes that turned more sharply, more fiercely upon information than Nur's did. When she heard what the truth of the matter was, she paused, though she was by habit so quick to speak, to let the significance of it grow upon her. Then she cried to me, dramatically:

"Miss Sahib, Rashid! There is hope now for Rashid! Come with me to entreat the doctor for her!"

The kindliness of those first words of hers did her credit. Rashid was the childless wife of her brother, the Raja.

"Ah, Rashid!" I sighed. "It's too late for Rashid, I'm afraid."

"It may not be! Not after this! Come, let's go to the doctor!"

"Why should we interrupt the doctor? You know she is willing to do what she can for Rashid, if only they would let her come here."

"Yes. But now, after this, they may let her come. Think how it would delay the second marriage!"

"Is that marriage all arranged?"

"Not settled. My mother is trying to make him agree, but he has managed to put her off somehow, as always. Now if he and I together—of course

Rashid won't defend herself!—and you and the doctor could persuade mother—if the doctor would promise Rashid would have a child ——"

"You know that the doctor won't promise that!"

"I think she ought to! Rashid is dying—just dying—as she thinks of another woman in the house. If she would even say that likely the treatment would be successful ——"

"I don't believe they would let Rashid come if they knew for certain that the doctor would give her twin boys!"

"Yes they would! You don't know how my brother hates the idea of this marriage! After this miracle, Miss Sahib, I know, I swear to you, that some way he will manage it! If you will help us! If you will come and promise!"

"I can't promise your mother such a thing! It's out of the question! It's your business to persuade her. You go home and see what you can do."

"Me! No one in the house listens to me except to contradict me! If I suggested such a thing, they would say no before I had closed my mouth on the words. I was just telling you that they are quarreling with me again. That's why I came here this morning, now—to get out of reach of their scolding tongues."

"Ah, Nur, what have you been saying now? Don't you see that if you will shock people every time you begin talking, you can't expect them to listen to your advice? If you deliberately annoy

them, how do you expect them to be persuaded by what you say?"

During these protestations Nur had stood looking at me thoughtfully, her head on one side, biting her little finger nail.

"Ah, well!" she sighed. And then, staunchly, "But it's not my fault! I want to tell you about it." She looked around for a place to sit down. She took me by the arm.

"Let's sit in that veranda, so I can tell you."

We had been standing really in the crowd of chattering women who were gathered about the clinic door. We crossed the square to its more deserted side, to the veranda of the operating-room. It was a convenient height, and in one of the archways we sat down, Nur in the blinding white sunlight, and I in the shade of the gay, yellow-green mulberry tree. Nur's servant, carrying her veils, followed us, and sat down at the distance which Nur's abrupt gesture to her indicated.

"It's those vile old gossiping tale-bearers that always cause the trouble. They find out some way what I do in Lahore, and they tell my mother. You know that widowed cousin of ours, Nawab Begam—well, her daughter is married in Lahore to my husband's cousin's wife's uncle's stepbrother's son. And she came and told my mother I was receiving men unveiled in my house!"

"Were you?"

"Certainly not. The man was my husband's cousin. Younger cousin, at that! He came back

from England—he studied medicine there—and he was unhappy because his family was trying to make him marry a girl he had never seen. He said he would not marry her unless he could see her. You know us people! Her family wouldn't allow it, and they fought about it; they were ready to take it into court, for they had been engaged as children, and the girl had had to wait for him. I got so sick of hearing about it—they were all our caste people—no one talked of anything else. So one day I said to my lord: 'Good God! what fools they all are! I'll settle the matter for them without any lawsuit! Bring him here tomorrow for tea, as is the English way.' And I got the girl there, so he could see her. She nearly lost her courage when he came in. But he had enough courage for both. And when he saw her face, Miss Sahib, he didn't want to wait for tea! He wanted to go home at once, to get the marriage arranged. My husband told him not to be a fool. But that very night he told his father he had repented of his unfilial rebellion and would reform and be an obedient son. And so they were married, and everything, before the story got about. And when they blamed me I said—for the girl's mother was positively arrogant—it was a strange thing to me that a woman like her should allow her daughter, unmarried, to go about to people's houses, seeing men. And so they stirred up this woman to tell my mother. And all the time the man was my husband's cousin! My brother shouted at me, and said that if he was a

cousin at all, he was so distant a cousin that only perversity could have perceived the relationship. I quoted the Christian religion at him: 'One is your father, even God, and all ye brethren.' If he isn't my husband's cousin, he's my brother before God, I said to them. And my mother—you know my mother, Miss Sahib!—she lost her temper. So I came away. Now what's the use of my going home to persuade them about Rashid!"

"You're perfectly useless! I don't see that anything can be done for her."

As I was about to leave her, to get to work, she suddenly thought of the right thing to do.

"There's that old aunt of my father's! She's the one who could persuade mother! I must get her to talk to mother!"

"Yes. She might do. She's a kindly person."

Nur chuckled. She laughed, suddenly.

"Kindly! Miss Sahib, God alone can estimate the extent of your innocence. That woman kindly! She's an old cat! But she'll be willing, anxious to get Rashid here, to delay the second marriage, for if my brother should die childless, her grandsons will be a little the richer! Uh! Kindly!"

I demurred, but it was useless. I let her take me presently into the room where the doctor sat. The eye cases had all been attended to and the doctor had risen from her chair for a moment of rest. She stood in the doorway of her private office, wiping her fingers carefully one by one, and looking depressed.

"We want to speak to you about Rashid," I said to her as Nur greeted her.

But she sighed unhappily and answered, looking at her wrist watch:

"It isn't one o'clock yet, not two hours since Taj left, and every woman who has been in here since has asked me for a baby, for herself or for some one else, no matter what she really came for. I didn't think at the time what the effect of this would be. You women are crazy—all of you—it seems to me."

We coaxed and we insisted. We kept at her until she promised that she would go to the Raja's house the following day. The doctor had no such sentimental interest in the women of the city as I had. Their subtle, plaintive beauty didn't touch her to the quick, as it did me. But Rashid she liked more than any of them. Besides, she had reasons for not wanting to seem stingy of her visits to the Raja's.

His house was but a little way from the hospital, toward the river, and I went with her to it the next afternoon when she was starting out to pay her professional visits. The Raja himself was not a ruling prince, though his grandfather had had a principality, minute to be sure, but sufficient to establish

the pretensions of the present generation. I have an idea that the English deposed him, or bought him out, when they took over the Panjab. However that may be, the Raja lived in perhaps the finest old Moslem house in the city and considered himself head of a clan all of whom were always called rajas, though there were scores of them. The women of these families had no corresponding title. I didn't know that when I made their acquaintance, and Nur's mother had a face of such regal beauty that she seemed to me, at first sight, to deserve the most resounding title I could give her. In my ignorance I called her Rani, and, though the word had to their minds a Hindu content, they considered my mistake an amusing and even endearing one. And she must have liked the honor, for presently even the servants were referring to her, in my presence at least, as the Rani Sahib.

We entered the Raja's house by the wide-open front door of a square hall, on either side of which were the men's rooms, with windows, without glass, opening on to the narrow street. Directly in front of us a curtained door led into a small outer courtyard, and on the further side of this there was another little door, more thickly and securely curtained with sacking, the entrance to the women's courtyard. The house, in a somewhat stately way, rose about this inner square to four stories on one side of it. The highest story, however, was only a smallish square tower, flat-roofed and parapeted, to which only the men of the family sometimes climbed at

sunset or dawn, to look across the city of flat roofs to the river and the barren rolling country beyond it. Entirely around this ground-floor courtyard of the women was a wide veranda with curious, deeply carved Cashmiri wooden pillars blackened with age, a veranda so wide that it cut off all the sunlight from the rooms behind it and left only a comparatively small open space in the center of the courtyard. The roof of this veranda, with the roofs of the darkened rooms behind it, was the floor of the much more airy courtyard above, which was reached by a stair so steep it was almost a ladder. This upper courtyard, in its turn, was surrounded on two sides by narrow rooms, and on its south side by a long veranda arranged to catch all the warmth of the sun on winter afternoons. Its walls were all of old, faded, rosy yellow brick, its floor was brick-paved, and it had a balustrade around the central opening into the lower court of strangely carved grayish stone. This floor, like the rest of the house, appeared to have been adapted to life by generations of families—not the Raja's, for they had had it only since the days of the deposed grandfather. It had many little cozy cooking-places, and snug spinning-places, and curious nooks and corners for children to play about in.

The doctor and I entered the house, crossed the outer court, lifted the curtain, and went into the women's court, and climbed the steep stair. There, in the favorite upper veranda, we found four women. Nur, with a bit of foreign crocheting in

her hands, was sitting next her mother on a low cot, her great-aunt faced them on a higher, brighter wooden bed more worthy of a guest, and Rashid, on a very low stool at her feet, was pretending to work at her spinning-wheel. The bland and surging sunshine beating up against those glowing walls, which trapped it, was so dazzling that the doctor, on entering, had to defend herself with dark glasses; but the women had been sitting there with only thin veils to protect their heads, delighting to bask in the first really spring-like heat of the season. They rose, of course, when they saw us, and rearranged themselves, and I took occasion to move the chair brought for me into the shade of a pillar, and pulled my sun hat down over my eyes, so that I could look at the bright creatures in front of me without discomfort.

The great-aunt, resuming her seat on the fine bed opposite me, was large and fat and darkly marked with eyebrows and lashes, and heavily jowled, with sagging chins, and sallow. Her yellowness and darkness were shining above the henna-colored flannel shirt she wore, over which she had donned a tighter one of sheer white, left open down the front. She was a rough and powerfully drawn charcoal sketch of a woman, compared to the little, fine, cameo-like Rani beside her. She was, of all the clan, the doctor's staunchest admirer. She had frequented the hospital in extremities and emergencies even in the first doctor's time. Others of them had been cured of pain quite as severe as hers, yet the

intensity of her gratitude was a family joke among them. She lived only a narrow lane or two away from the Raja's and came often to the house, but when I saw her there that day I knew her presence had been arranged by Nur's cunning.

The Rani looked older than the great-aunt, although I think it quite unlikely that she was more than fifty. She always said she didn't know her age, exactly, and I believed her. One sees skin like hers among all nations, so fine and soft that it goes early into network of the most delicate wrinkles. Her aristocratic face had a beautiful symmetry, but her dark eyes looked at the world with a disapproving superiority. She had on, that afternoon, a peacock-green Cashmere shirt, purple-shot silk trousers, a white veil, and many gold earrings and bracelets. And Rashid, who had resumed her lowly seat at the spinning-wheel had an orange-colored shirt, white trousers, a casual faded almond-colored veil, and little jewelry. She seemed, as usual, to have put on whatever garment had happened to be nearest her hand. She was the fairest of the four, but she was deeply pock-marked. She had no prettiness. She had a wide, calm forehead, an appealing sort of short upper lip, and a heart-broken, entirely hopeless proud dignity. She knew she was pitied and she refused to be pitied. Everyone liked her, even her disappointed mother-in-law, and I have often thought that if her son's barren wife had been a lesser person than Rashid, she long ago would have been replaced by a more fruitful vine. The naughty

Nur was devoted to her, though she never understood her submission to fate. She thought it simply a spiritless surrender. Nur was in white, except for her cherry-colored shirt of finest wool, and a great deal of gold jewelry which I saw she had donned as a means of conciliating her mother, who thought a young matron without some weight of gold only half dressed. Her garments, though they were approximately the same style as those of the others, were just different enough to seem exotic. She looked as a Parisian mannequin would have looked in a country vicarage, out of her setting. She was not so fair as her mother, nor had her features any such interesting symmetry. The contrast between them never failed to interest me. Many illnesses had so aged the Rani that it seemed impossible that the sixteen-year-old girl could be her daughter. The greatest difference, however, was in their expression. For while the Rani's carriage showed plainly her instinct to withdraw as much as possible from an inferior world, every movement of Nur's head, every quick shifting of her eyes, proclaimed her intention of jumping into the very midst of the fray of existence to find exactly what it was all about. The Rani that day received us with the coldness she always had for us when she was disappointed in Nur. For to her mind Nur's revolt was due to the hostile and degenerate civilization which we represented. And it amused me to see that Nur pretended to be surprised to see us and showed not very much interest in our coming. Indeed, as soon as the old

great-aunt began her campaign in behalf of Rashid, Nur began an argument with the cook, who was peeling turnips on the floor near her, about how they were to be prepared for the evening meal, and kept on, in an undertone, insisting upon her instructions as if what we were saying didn't concern her at all.

"You blessed of God, your presence enriches this house!" began the sophisticated old aunt, and the cynical creature sounded for once, at least, wholehearted in her enthusiasm. "What food have you been feeding on from heaven, now! I didn't hear about it till this morning!" And she turned and scowled a great scowl at the servant, who apparently had delayed relating the great story to her. "I came at once to see Rashid. It was of *her* I thought, of course. Tell me, now. Is it true that this happy woman came to you many times, during many years, and you sent her away without hope? Is it true that often you said you could do nothing for her? How God does approve of the persevering! You even advised her not to consult you further, didn't you? And yet, now —— Oh, Miss Sahib, have we not always been your friends? Have we not laid our possessions at your feet—our hearts, our children? What more do you ask of us? How can we persuade you to have mercy on this our dear daughter? What can we give you?"

I said, dryly: "You might give her a chance! She has never had a chance, even to see Rashid, in the hospital!"

"But what is it you can do in the hospital that you can't do here?" protested the Rani. "Why are you determined to get everyone into that place? Haven't we got tables in this house for you to use? We will send a carriage and have all your—knives and—things moved here, if you will—do something!"

The doctor explained. If they wanted to send Rashid for an examination, she would examine her. She couldn't promise, until she had examined her, to operate. She wouldn't promise, though she did decide "to use knives" that Rashid would ever have a child. "I promise you nothing at all, you understand! Rashid, don't look at me like that! I'm not omnipotent!"

But it was out of the question, a trip to the hospital. The Rani said as much impatiently, as if such a remark ought to have been superfluous. Surely we understood by this time that it was out of the question!

But, "No!" cried the great-aunt. "Yesterday perhaps it was out of the question! But today! After such an event! Are you going to shut your eyes to God's miracles?" she demanded, scandalized, of the Rani. "I say everything has to be thought out anew, today!"

I thought the old aunt was pleading for Rashid very cleverly when she appealed to the Rani's devout fear of God. For the Rani said her prayers, perhaps not always five times a day, but yet regularly and devoutly, and upbraided the aunt often but futilely

for her enthusiasm for so infidel an institution as our hospital. The cunning old aunt went on confronting the Rani with murmurs of Arabic and goodness knows what of arguments from revered books, and finally with great misgivings, lest they all be found to be sinning against the mercy of God, she said sanctimoniously,

"We must be very careful! What forgiveness is there for blasphemy? Nur, my child, go and see if your brother is in the house, and tell him to come here."

Then Nur, like a humble and disinterested little sister, rose and started down the stairs, crocheting as she went. Her mother called after her not to go beyond the inner curtain. And the next moment I heard her calling below:

"Brother! Oh, brother dear! Are you there? Our great-aunt desires your presence." And then she came back up the stairs, and sat down by her mother, looking about her carelessly as if she wondered what all the fuss was about.

Immediately Raja Mohammed Salim Khan joined us. You see how it was. From where we sat we saw first his head appearing up the stairway, and then as he crossed the courtyard by the wrought-stone balustrade he had the square and flat-roofed tower rising behind him and that dazzling creamy sunlight all around him. He came toward us, a slender man, his very full white longcloth trousers tied with a crimson silk cord whose tassel swung below his Oriental outside shirt. His brown cloth coat

was unbuttoned. He had on no waistcoat to conceal his soft shirt. He was wearing a tussore turban bound smartly and tightly around a jaunty little gold-embroidered foundation, and the end of it hung in a nice long tail down his back almost to his knees. His western yellow calfskin shoes were unacquainted with polish. He had a finely carved, rather delicate and spoiled-child face, heavily lidded and deeply lined, preyed upon, perhaps, by the childlessness of his wife, and a jaunty little black mustache. He came toward us, bowing to the doctor and me, and then there transpired an event which was a caress.

It was his salutation of the great-aunt. He came to it with a grace which Indian men have above all others that I have seen. The West has nothing like it, nor has China or Japan. It seems to belong to those whose ancestors have never for a thousand generations lifted a weight, strained a muscle, or taken a step hurriedly. He walked as one sees leopards walking in a film. He bowed down low before his aunt until his head was on a level with her elbows as she sat on the bed. And she stretched out her hands and blessed him. She kissed the top of his turban and patted it twice, and stroked his cheeks tenderly. It was a gesture that, though I must have seen it nearly every day for years, never failed to give me a thrill of delight. Perhaps some wicked femininity within me rejoiced to see a grown man so reduced, in one second, to babyhood again. It seemed to me that the man bending low was always

acknowledging the helplessness of his infancy, and the old woman, as she blessed him, was reassuring him of the sufficiency of her defending maternity. It may be that I read too much into the beauty of the greeting. I dare say that Moslems, having thus graciously submitted to their aunts or their mothers, turn at once to mature defiance, or self-asserting ingratitude. However that may be, the old aunt on that occasion proceeded to cuddle her grandnephew down beside her so that she could keep on almost furtively patting and encouraging him. What chance had the poor man, really, with such an aunt and mother and sister surrounding him? The wonder is that with a face like his he had been able for ten years to avoid a second marriage.

"It is about the doctor's miracle that I want to tell you," the aunt began. And then I had an impulse of liking for the man because he smiled quite charmingly, showing a mouthful of shining white teeth, and answered quickly:

"Oh yes! That's a very fine thing! I know all about it."

I can't say how much of what followed was spontaneous and how much of it was acted out according to Nur's instructions. At any rate, the aunt answered, as if she was disappointed in him:

"How did *you* come to hear about it?"

"I heard it in the street last night. Everyone in the bazaar was talking about it."

"It is Rashid we are all thinking about," said the aunt, lifting her heavy eyebrows significantly.

He looked quickly at his wife. I saw that she didn't even lift her eyes to him. She kept looking steadfastly at the bit of spinning cotton her fingers played with.

"Does the Doctor Miss promise ——" he began, vaguely, speaking to the aunt or to me. He hesitated, I thought, to speak directly to the doctor. She couldn't tolerate the man, and he must have known it. He irritated her because he would not pay his bills. It seemed to her absolutely right that Raja Mohammed Salim Khan, if he was too proud to allow his womenfolk to come to the hospital, should pay for every professional visit she made to his home. It seemed to him absolutely wrong. He called it extortionate impertinence. Why should he have to pay for what sweepers and outcasts got free? When first the doctor had insisted upon her bills being paid—after all, she supported the hospital partly from the fees she got from the reluctant rich—he had sent her the money due in a letter beginning "Darling Edith." She had sent it promptly back—after taking out the money, of course—with a pointed request that henceforth he address her in a more conventional manner. I tried to make her believe that he had hunted the offensive phrase carefully out of some letter-writing book. She still believed it was deliberate impertinence. So now he spoke warily, and she answered, flatly:

"I want you to understand that I promise nothing! Nothing! I only say that some women are childless because of a very little thing which can

soon be set right. And under the circumstances I think Rashid ought to have every chance."

"It would, of course, be setting no precedent, after so unusual an occurrence," he considered.

"Certainly not!" I said. And the doctor went on to say that she had a little back room, a most private room with a curtained veranda in no way overlooked by the surrounding houses, to which they might add a second curtain if they wished. The Rani asked, cunningly:

"I suppose my son could see her when he desired?"

But the doctor saw the trap, and answered, primly:

"Certainly he could not see her when he liked! You have no idea, Rani Sahib, how *purdah* we really are! Do you suppose I would let your son inside our walls to violate the privacy of my other patients!" She eyed the Rani indignantly.

How soon might they expect the doctor's skill to avail them, the Rani asked. The doctor suggested a year. Delay the marriage a year, she suggested.

But that was too much.

"Who knows if I will be alive to make arrangements in a year?" the Rani cried bitterly.

"Who knows if any of us will!" retorted the doctor. "We are in the hands of God. And certainly, Rani Sahib, you want to feel that in all that concerns Rashid you have acted with justice and fairness."

That was about the least useful argument the doctor could have advanced, in my opinion. But

just then Nur-ul-Nissa spoke up, taking hold of her mother's hand to get her attention.

"And a little prayed-for baby of this sort, born after so long, is such a sweet sort, isn't it! I was that sort of child to you, wasn't I, mother?"

It was almost pitiful to me to see how entirely unable the Rani was to withstand the least sign of affection from her unnatural daughter. Succumbing, she murmured:

"Ah, my dear child!" and drew her toward her and kissed her forehead fervently. Her son saw how she had melted, and said, quickly:

"Everything considered, it is my desire that she go to you, if my mother gives her consent—this not establishing any custom of going about the streets." The Raja looked at his wife. That time she lifted her eyes and gave him such a look—twelve years of tender slave-like love there was in that glance. It stirred me, and I said:

"It isn't, Raja Sahib, as if Rashid was that sort of woman—one who would take advantage of your kindness. It isn't as if she was"—I looked at Nur, who didn't see me, and added, vaguely—"like some women."

He replied quickly that he agreed with me. He looked again at Rashid significantly, and added:

"Certainly she is not that sort. If my mother will allow it, she shall be brought to you at once."

That was the deferential way he put it. I don't know whether Nur had advised him to put it that way, or whether it was his habit of politeness, or

whether he was resolving in his heart to do for once as he pleased, or whether it was his habit to obey his mother.

"Of course there is always some very little chance," murmured the doctor.

The old Rani was still looking at Nur wistfully, remembering. She could not resist the thought of a little baby born after so long, a little prayed-for baby.

"If it is God's will that she go ——" she sighed.

"I'll just pray and pray!" exclaimed Nur with startling devotion. "Who knows? He has had mercy on this poor woman. Maybe ——"

ACCORDINGLY, a day or two later Rashid, under the protection of the old aunt, came to the hospital and was obscurely tucked away in the most private room. By that time the news of Taj's hope had penetrated the thickest door curtains of the city. People say our women are shut in, do they, cut off from one another? Be that as it may, really good stories fly over our lanes and suburbs as quickly as breezes pass over housetops. For in our city, of course, we, being women, don't talk about legislative reform, or politics, or primary education. For these and the kindred silly subjects which occupy our men we care

nothing. Our topic is babies. Just babies. And marriage, of course, as the ways and means thereof, and therefore sometimes men. But it has often interested me to observe that the more men insist upon child-bearing as the only function of women, the more they exaggerate their own unimportance in the scheme of things. For if women devote themselves exclusively to children the need they have of men is short and soon over. And I have sometimes wished their masters could have a sobering realization of the indifference with which my neighbors dismissed from their minds the whole male sex. (Sons, of course, are not really of that sex. They are forever babies.)

That was why Taj's hope disturbed the routine of the most conventional families around us. By the next week gentlemen the most strictly orthodox, the most nearly fanatical, who absolutely disapproved of such inventions of the devil as women's hospitals —except in case of critical illnesses—gentlemen of that sort were finding their wives seized with pains which could be relieved only by personal interviews with the doctor and a morning of sitting about gossiping freely in the sunshine of our friendly compound. It was inevitable, of course, in our cynical city, that explanations of the miracle should have been suggested which excluded Taj's husband. But the possible truth of such theories didn't really lessen the wonder of the situation.

Presently the morning clinics were filled with barren women from villages so remote that their

names had never before appeared in the hospital records. It made no difference that the doctor gave most of them no encouragement. They were quite able to keep one another's spirits up. "Remember it was forty years that she went on saying to this woman that she could do nothing for her," they counseled one another. Once when the doctor exclaimed, impatiently, "Do you think I am omnipotent!" an old Hindu woman answered, "You must acknowledge that it looks like it!" At that time there was a somewhat makeshift cantonment near by, and the colonel's wife one day said to the doctor:

"What is this story that we suddenly hear about your hospital? My husband says his men are all asking for leave, and all giving the same reason. They all want to go some place to get their wives or sisters or daughters to come to your hospital. They say there is not another such one any place."

The doctor sighed, explaining:

"Sometimes I feel quite sick about it. So many of these women are going to be more disappointed than ever. It would have been better if this had never happened!"

If Taj had heard that, she would have thought it blasphemy. If I had told her the doctor had said it, she wouldn't have believed me. It was touching to see the new dignity which she was putting on as she waited her great day. She bore herself gravely and humbly, as becomes a woman from whom God Himself has taken away the reproach. She tried earnestly

to follow the doctor's advice in everything. She pretended not to be frightened by the omens her superstitious neighbors saw everywhere. The number of crows alighting in the shadow of her walls looked bad to them. The way some pariah dog suddenly howled, as the afternoon call to prayer rang out from the mosque, made them lift their eyebrows significantly at one another. Taj consulted some of us hospital folk about all these auguries, and was, I think, usually reassured by our interpretations of them.

One morning she sent for me imperatively. The doctor would not go to see her. She said that, though walking was by this time not easy for her, she ought to walk to the hospital for her health. I sometimes stopped in as I was passing her house. As I drew aside her curtain that time, in answer to her entreaty, I saw her standing at the top of the clay stairway which, along one side of the tiny courtyard, twisted up to the roof of her living-room.

"Come up to my garden, Beloved of God!" she called to me.

I labored up. The steps were few but very steep. The garden that I saw at the top was like the life of its mistress—highly walled about and not extensive. It consisted of three pots of marigolds, two of which seemed to be living. I sat down on a cot in the shadow of the adjoining house, which was one of the garden walls.

"I want to ask you something! I have had a dream!"

"What have you been eating?"

"No!" she protested. "It wasn't that sort. It was a dream of little children! I saw a bathing-pool under a banyan tree of many great legs, and there in the dark shade sat the prophet Jesus! And do you know what He was doing! He was playing with children, dozens of them, hundreds! They were all naked, and bathing and splashing the water, and they were chasing one another, and running, all wet and dripping, into His arms to hide, so that His clothes were all wet and—muddied. And then He rose up, tall, and I saw Him go to where the very little ones were, many of them, who wanted to get into the water, but couldn't walk well yet. Those ones He picked up and held them so that they could kick their feet in the water, and I saw them smiling and gurgling at Him, without teeth. He played with them a long time, and the bigger ones were tugging at His clothes to get Him to come to them. Then I woke up. That was all. Miss Sahib! It was a dream of your religion! What does it mean?" she demanded, fervently.

"It's a thoroughly good dream, Taj. I wish I had seen it myself. It means that the prophets want babies kept clean."

"Does it, honestly?"

"It certainly does. I should hope I know what a dream of my own religion means!"

"I knew you would. That's why I sent for you."

"What did Jesus look like?"

Taj hesitated and apologized. She didn't want to seem disrespectful to the hospital religion.

"I don't know," she said, slowly. "I didn't—see His face, exactly. I was looking at the babies. Imagine such a lot of little children! All naked! All so sweet!"

I didn't say anything, but I wondered if she would have taken time to look at the face of God Himself if there had been a baby about.

Meanwhile, the monotonous fare of the mission-house dining-room was being enlivened from time to time by gifts that came from Taj in spite of our protestations. She had always spent, naturally, a good deal of the time she leaned against her wall in drawling our directions for the preparation of her food. There was nothing casual about what began arriving at our table, trays of roast chicken piled high with white rice, platters of saffron-colored delicacies, of sweets covered with edible tin foil which are good for the brain, little jars of choice mangoes cooked in mustard oil by the heat of the sun. Her husband, that good man, ordered the best fish in the river to be caught for the doctor, and none that were caught seemed to him quite worthy of their mission. We seldom ate river fish, ourselves, because there was always so much cholera further up the river, and the doctor believed that the victims of it were sometimes thrown into the stream. However, if guests, coming from drier places, clamored and insisted upon fish, she let them have it. Taj's husband, I understood, had some hereditary rights

over the fish of the river, or over the fishermen who lived on an island on the river, because that island, the varying story went, had been promised to his forebears by Lord Roberts. People said that the commander, standing on the banks with an army, had cried to the boatman, "Find boats to take my army across and I will give you that island." And the boatman had called back—this is a fisherman's story—"we will give you the boats without reward!" Whereupon the young commander had replied, "I will give you the island without conditions," and forgot his promise for forty years; but when he was reminded of it by some unworthy descendant, he fulfilled it with lordly haste. However that may be, there is no doubt about the fact that on that sandy island men stand with long hooks to catch great nets full of melons grown farther up, and floated down in the icy water of the flooding river. The very finest of all those melons we ate that year, melons more lovely to look at and to smell than tea-roses. And the earliest great red mangoes, much too expensive for our common use, Fazl Alahi had sent to us from Bombay in his wife's name.

The doctor took her holiday as usual that summer, though Taj didn't know how she was to endure her absence. The day she got back home we found on our tea table a cake of surprising magnificence. Fazl Alahi had evidently hunted out the best caterer of Delhi for his purpose.

"There isn't another cake like this within a hundred miles!" I cried, when I saw it. "You can't be

stingy after this! You ought to give Taj twins for such a gift!"

But she reproved me mildly for my flippancy and cut the cake. It was much too rich and heavy and grand for the weather, that gaudy confection. The heat was so extreme that one could have eaten angels' food only by the grace of God. However, the rains broke that week and we had relief.

And the next week Taj was prematurely and hideously relieved of her burden. They hurried her to the hospital, and—oh, the tragedy of it!—it was a boy. To lose a baby—and the child a boy!

"Lose the baby!" echoed the doctor. "Nonsense! It's a perfectly good, strong child!" Taj was too ill to know what was going on. Her husband sat in the dust at the men's gate of the hospital, and bareheaded, wept aloud. He knew what every little girl in our town knows before she has lost her baby teeth —that no eight-months baby ever lives. But almost before he knew what had happened to him, the doctor sent word to him to refrain from weeping yet a little while. And the women in the hospital were telling one another that the doctor had said the child would live. That morning all the women of the clinic were hushed and curious. The doctor had made a little house, it seemed, all of glass and gold and silk, in which the baby was to live. And she was feeding it and she was bathing it, and she was stuffing it with medicines, and making it breathe. But they could not rejoice, really, in these wonderful

doings of hers because they didn't believe that the child could survive.

X

The doctor certainly deserved the fame and love she got out of that case. It had come at a particularly awkward time for her. The mercury in the thermometer, those rainy steamy days, leaped up and fell back again many degrees every hour. One really trustworthy Indian assistant had gone for her holiday and another was dying of tuberculosis. (There was always some one dying of tuberculosis.) There was no nurse in the place well enough trained to manage that baby. The doctor couldn't trust it to her slips of beginners. Her conveniences were few and primitive. So she practically took care of that child herself the first fortnight, carrying her other duties as well. And in all her weariness and sleeplessness she couldn't help chuckling about it, for she knew she was covering herself with such a cloud of glory as even the first doctor had seldom achieved. That carefully guarded place where the baby lay growing seemed for a week or so to be the whole fact of the hospital. And when she broke her own rule, and with due precautions took the father in past the curtains and screens to see his child, all the women agreed that she had done the right thing.

By the end of a month, Taj's family—that large family—was reunited in the little clay house which it pleases the doctor to call her family quarters. Its courtyard door was but a step from the men's gate, and the watchman on duty there was charged to let no one without permission go in to see the baby. The doctor wouldn't even let me go in for some time. One day she said Taj was asking to see me. I went in with her. Taj was sitting up on a low cot with the baby lying near her. The doctor picked up the child and put him in my arms. I said, "In God's name! In God's name!"—the proper Moslem baby talk, and looking at Taj I asked as one does:

"What are you going to call him?"

She looked at me and cried:

"Oh, Miss Sahib, I have named him Theodore-*Indeed!*"

At least that must serve for a translation of her words, for I am not able to explain all their significance. In our town most names signify directly, and not through forgotten derivations or strange foreign implications, the religious intentions of the parents choosing them. The baby's father's name, Fazl Alahi, meant divine grace, and each word of it was in the common tongue of the people using it, so that when they said divine grace they meant divine grace. It is significant that perhaps half the girls in Indian Christian families are called either Blessing, Beloved, or Precious, as if these mothers, loving their daughters more than their sons, seized the first opportunity to express the new status which their faith

had given womanhood by announcing in its very name that a baby girl was a blessing. In the same way, Moslems, and Hindus too, for that matter, have varieties of names, and plays upon names intended to acknowledge the child a gift of God, like our Theodore. But among us the significance of the Greek word is obscure if not altogether lost from common thought. There was not the least element of significance lacking in the five stately Arabic syllables which Taj chose for her son, Inayat Ullah, "the Gift of God." She might have said it in other ways, in Persian words, in fewer sounds, in a less dignified, more workaday manner. But she chose the slower way, and she pronounced it with sustained passion, so that it meant God's last and ultimate gift. "Theodore-*Indeed*," she said to me that morning, and burst into weeping, the weak and uncontrollable weeping of sheer joy. The doctor put me out at once. Taj was too weak to have me disturbing her that way, she said, as if it was my fault. I would have plenty of time to play with the baby later, she said. Which indeed I had. And often when I heard Taj cooing those syllables into his little learning ears, I speculated upon the limits and possibilities of adoration.

The parents and the baby stayed in the family quarters a fortnight longer. One morning before they left, the doctor came out to the veranda where we had six-o'clock morning tea together. It was not our custom to say grace on that occasion, but she bowed her head in an absent-minded way and

murmured, "For what we are about to receive, the Lord make us truly thankful." And to that she added, quite distinctly, "And mercifully preserve the life of that child of Taj's."

Naturally I looked at her curiously. I knew she hadn't had much sleep.

"What's the matter with the child!" I asked. "He isn't ill?"

"No," she said, and she sighed very deeply. "It's terrible to love anything as much as they love that baby. Do you know that man sits up and looks at it all night long?"

I smiled at the idea. But she said:

"I do believe he does! I was going around the wards at half past three. I went up to see that girl who has been having convulsions, and from the veranda I could see right down into Taj's courtyard. I looked down, and there he was bending over the child, listening, looking at him close, as if he was listening to his breathing. I watched him, and he just sat there bending over him, and didn't move. I thought it was strange, and I stopped in and asked him what he was doing—if anything was wrong. And he said no, he was just looking at the baby, because he had so little time to see him during the day. He said he hadn't been to bed because he was just watching how the child breathed. I told him it was half past three, and he said it was funny how the nights got away now before he realized it was bedtime."

"He was just hypnotizing himself, Doctor!

Haven't you ever watched a baby breathing? I mean, if he isn't naked so you can see his abdomen, even the top of his head will do it, rising and falling all the time, so frightfully. You can hypnotize yourself wondering about it if you try."

"*You* probably could! I couldn't!" replied the doctor, patiently. She always had great patience with my imagination—as with any incurable disease.

Finally Taj and her two men went back to their own little house. The wonder of it doubtless wore away, so that Fazl Alahi could sleep at night. And Taj probably forgot her pain in her joy that a man had been born into the world. There is, however, some doubt about that. For an old Indian Christian woman said to me once:

"When our Lord spoke those words, He spoke as a man. For if He had spoken as God, He would have known that no woman ever forgets that pain."

There was one thing that went on hurting Taj, however. It was the doctor's patent but inexplicable indifference to the heavenly baby. I really believe that Taj had left the hospital supposing that the doctor would come to her house to look at the baby two or three times a day. The doctor's negligence was a real shock to her.

"Tell me, why is she angry with us?" she asked me privately, again and again.

I always answered: "Can't you see she is busy? She has scarcely time to eat!"

But Taj insisted more than once: "I know. But when I take him to the hospital to see her, she just

looks at him for a second, and says he is growing, and then she turns to the next case! Doesn't she think he is really a worthy child?"

I tried to reassure her by saying that I thought him a most worthy child. But I couldn't say it often enough, heartily enough, to placate her. That autumn and that winter I often stopped at Taj's house just to play with her baby.

I had him on my knees one morning when he was about six months old, for an interview. We were sitting on a bed that almost filled Taj's courtyard—which was so small that it was like a deep khaki box with its lid off. He was a strong little animal. I suppose that from the day he had left the hospital no one had ever held a hand behind his head to keep it from bobbing about. Most of his waking hours he had been encouraged to sit upright on the palm of some admirer's hand, and he had grown strong, balancing his infancy. That morning he had no garments on to hide his charms, only some lines of antimony about his little round eyes and some wrinkles of fat across his tummy. His shoulders and back were fine and broad, as smooth as satin and of a deep rich old-rose color. Though I held his hands, he waved his arms about energetically and kicked his firm little legs manfully. A very hater of babies could scarcely have begrudged him admiration; no one could have, certainly, who ever looked with pleasure on a day-old chick or enjoyed a promising puppy.

"Wasn't the angel right?" he gurgled at me, sput-

tering and smiling and flourishing his two white teeth. "Hasn't every one joy and gladness because of me?"

"Indeed they have, you gift of God!" I agreed.

"Isn't it a grand world, and how I shall subdue it," he cooed, trying to pull his hands away from mine. "And if I could only get away from your grasp and shut my fingers tight in that stuff so soft above your head, how I would pull it!"

"I won't have you abusing my hair," I retorted. And I cried "Boo!" at him so convincingly that he wrinkled down into giggles. He laughed and he argued so wonderfully that Taj, who was washing his milk cup at the water jar, had to leave her work and come to wonder at his progress. As soon as he caught sight of her he realized that he was bored by my unsustaining presence and called imperiously to his heavenly host to take him away from me. She dropped her work and put out her hands to him, and he stretched up to her in an excited, hungry ecstasy. So, kissing him and kissing him, his food and his life sat down on the bed by me and drew him to her breast. She held both his pink feet in one hand, and her lips were against his head.

One of the neighbors came in, crowded past the bed, and sat down on the lowest stair.

"Is it true that the doctor is ill?" she asked. "Is she going early to the hills for a long time?"

"Yes. She has come to the end of her strength. She has got to have a holiday." I looked at Taj and

remembered. "I wish she was going home. I wish she was going to be married."

"What! Going home? She *can't* go home! The summer's heat coming on and my baby just getting his teeth!"

I kept my face serious.

"Well, what good is it going to do the doctor, after all, if all the babies in the town live to get their teeth, and she hasn't got any baby herself, and he hasn't got any teeth?"

"Oh!" cried Taj, annoyed to have been deceived even a moment by me. "I might have known you were joking! What would the doctor want another baby for, anyway? Isn't Theodore-*Indeed* her own baby? Isn't he enough! Aren't you her baby! Aren't you her darling baby?" she sang to the child.

But he refused to commit himself. He was almost asleep.

One day when Theodore-*Indeed* was about six weeks old—to go back to that eventful autumn—I dropped in at the Raja's house and found Rashid alone in the upper veranda. In her careless, colorless garments she sat on a little cot, sewing. She began almost at once:

"Has the baby gone home, then—the blessed woman's baby?"

"Yes."

She started to fold up the pink silk thing she was embroidering and, looking at me, asked, with an infinite sigh:

"Doesn't it seem strange to you, Miss Sahib, that such perfect things can happen in this world?"

"It *is* rare," I murmured, indifferently. I didn't want to talk to her, of all people, about babies. The doctor had told her, a few months before, that no skill of hers could give the Raja's house what Rashid had failed to give it. So I said: "That's a lovely piece of silk. What are you making of it?"

She said, quietly: "A wedding gift for the new wife—for my co-wife."

"It is arranged, then, finally?"

"Yes."

"Oh!" I said, stupidly. What was there to say?

"Let me see how you are doing it. It's a nice design, this."

She spread the garment out for my inspection. It was a cherry-colored length of silk which was to be a kimono-like shirt. An oval piece had been cut out for the neck, with an opening perhaps twelve inches down the front. Around this Rashid was embroidering a little narrow solid design in gold and black and light blue.

"I never saw you at this sort of work before," I said. "I didn't know you did it so beautifully." Then I looked more closely at the pattern down the

front. There was an irregularity about it, little flowers scattered here and there on either side, some as far out as the sleeve openings. I was simply making conversation. "I haven't seen one of this style before," I said. "What do they call this pattern?" In our town we name our patterns, and very nice names indeed they are that we give them. The mild woman answered, without raising her voice, without the flutter of an eyelid:

"This is called the design of tears. For if a tear falls as you work, you make a little flower over it to hide it."

"So appropriate," I murmured, drawing away. The flowers were rather thick, and I didn't want one to be added because of me.

"Her people have sent me these." She showed me her wrists, each with a beautifully chased gold bracelet an inch wide. It seemed strange to me that she should be getting a wedding present. But it was their custom, she explained to me. "To insure my good will, the new wife's family sent me them," she said, without irony. I thought it safe to ask their marriage customs, since they vary so greatly from place to place, from caste to caste. She took occasion dutifully to praise the greatness of the house which was now to be allied to her husband's.

"They are rich, rich," she said. "It is the great family of that region, of Cabuli blood, from the foothills. All the men of that family have four wives."

"How old is the girl?"

"Fourteen." Then her sweet upper lip twitched. "Those women of the foothills are very fair, Miss Sahib!" She was afraid.

"Some of them are."

"They have gray eyes! This one has gray eyes!"

"Has she?" I asked, indifferently, as if I didn't suppose anyone thought gray eyes especially beautiful.

Just then the old Rani joined us, apologizing for the delay. She heard what we were talking of and she began zestfully praising the bride.

"In a month she will be here! Oh, when you see her, Miss Sahib! Fair, she is, brilliantly fair and beautiful—a very dawn of beauty! And strong! A mother of men!" And she looked, as she said it, half contemptuously at Rashid. Then she went on in her cruel exultation. I wanted impulsively to snub her. I turned away from her toward Rashid. And just then Rashid lifted her head and looked about that courtyard, so that I saw her and got up to go home. I didn't go back to that house for three months. For the wild despair in that good woman's eyes suddenly had revealed to me all the very quality of those twelve years of mother-in-law snubs, of agonized waiting upon God and the power of her lover, that long, slow, bitter sorrow of which the sure culmination was this discarding of her for the more fit. I had to keep away from her pain. And often when I thought of the look which she had cast about the place she was surrendering, Wilde's lines

haunted me, about the guardsman who was sentenced to death ——

> I never saw a man who looked
> So wistfully at the day.

It was like a flash of lightning which on a summer's night illumines a great stretch of prairie. But all she said to me, as I took my leave that sad day, was:

"I won't see you for some time, Miss Sahib. I am going on a long visit to my mother. My father is dead and she is lonely."

Did she think, as she said it, of the possibility that she might never come back if the new wife proved pleasing to her lord? Surely, I said to myself, that man is fond of her, for if he had not been, why should he so long have postponed his marriage? But I was unhappy as I thought of her, not knowing that I was yet to see her the happy mother of a family of children got by a way not known to the scientific West. The story, after all, was to have such a happy ending.

After a little I heard that the new wife had arrived. A servant was sent to ask me to join the rejoicings that welcomed her. But I didn't go to them. I had no heart for that new wife. Nur, who had condescended to come home for the occasion, came to the hospital to tell me about her.

"You ought to see her," she chuckled. "Then you'll know what a clever woman my mother is!

She got him one that would serve her purpose this time!"

"Why? What's she like? Is she pretty?"

Nur shrugged and grinned.

"Yes, she's pretty, and she's—fertile-looking! Like a field of sugar cane, she is productive!"

"Do you like her, then?" I was puzzled by her tone.

"Yes. She's all right. She's just one of that sort —you know—an illiterate creature," commented Nur, who was by this time in the fifth form. "She's rather a likeable child. And her clothes! God of Grace, you must see her wardrobe!"

"Is she happy?"

"Yes. I suppose so. She's just the common village sort that would be happy married."

"Is Rashid back?"

Nur's face lost its brightness.

"No, she isn't. But I wish she would come. The sooner she comes the easier it will be for her. You must come to see them. My mother told me to ask you to come."

"I'll come to see Rashid."

"Yes, that's what I mean. You must come to see her often."

A few days later the Rani summoned me imperatively. Her servant was to wait on the veranda until I came. I knew she might sit there for days. It was the old out-of-door servant, a loquacious creature long widowed, whose husband, in her youth, had cut off her nose so that she would no longer be

too beautiful to other men—a precaution not uncommon among deceived Panjabi husbands. I didn't pay much attention to the praises of the new wife which she kept singing as we went along.

But I must say that when I saw the Raja's bride I got a thoroughly good surprise. Undoubtedly, I thought, blinking, the Rani is a clever woman. For I never had before seen a young girl who at fourteen looked so entirely fit for motherhood. She was enchantingly pretty, and shy before me, and she stood there slender but strong-looking, her lovely young body just ready, her beautiful round breasts alert, waiting.

And she was named for that spicy queen, Bilkis of Sheba.

Now really, of course, it was Solomon that was arrayed in glory. But the trousseau of Bilkis was a surpassing affair. When I saw her first, that day, she had gold at her neck, gold at her ears, a bit of curiously wrought gold at one nostril—as a very smart little earring nestles against a pink ear lobe. She had gold studs down the front of her shirt, fastened together by little gold chains. She had arms full of gold bracelets. She had rings on her toes. She had a purple-and-gold transparent veil, a sage-green shirt and cherry-red silk trousers. Her eyes—oh, poor Rashid!—were gray, and so shaped that when she looked straight at you her eyelids were half lowered and her long lashes cast little delicate shadows. Her face was fair and soft and shapely, and her black eyebrows were finely drawn and almost

straight, until at the ends they suddenly curved down charmingly. Her lips were very red that morning. In spite of all her beauty, she was lonely, she was disconsolate in that house.

The Rani was exulting in my surprise. "She comes from the hills," she said to me, "where great ladies are free to go about more than they are in cities. The air is very fine, up there, and the girls grow strong, as you see. She finds this house confining, after that one. So do you come and amuse her—I mean, of course, teach her things. Teach her to make fancy things with her hands, for she has already had lessons from Nur. My child," she said to the girl, who was looking at me with curiosity, "in your father's house you had no white ladies like this one to come to you. These are our friends, these foreign ladies. And I don't mind if she comes to teach you—things." And then she added to me:

"Of course you understand that she is very well educated. She has read everything."

"The Koran, you mean?"

"Yes. Everything. The Koran."

Was the Rani, I wondered, finding her grand young daughter-in-law rather contemptuous of her establishment, that she was boasting of her friendship with infidels? For whatever reason, she intended that the girl should like me. And she wanted me to approve of the girl, which at first I didn't intend doing. But presently I found myself warming toward the helpless young thing. After all, it wasn't her fault that she had come to supplant Rashid.

And naturally she would be making herself beautiful for her first lover. He passed through the courtyard where we were sitting, after a little, and bowed to me, and passed on. And the girl looked up shyly toward him, grew pink, and looked down again. And as he went away I chuckled to myself to see how her eager gray eyes below those demure lowered lids watched his feet departing.

Then the Rani, unable to conceal her satisfaction a moment longer, said to me:

"Already, Miss Sahib, it has come to pass! She has Hope! I have reason to believe that she already has Hope!"

The girl protested, murmuring and blushing and sulking ever so little. But the greedy old woman beamed at her unashamed, and at me. And then she suddenly grew grim, remembering the reason she had sent for me, and withdrew her approval from me. She had summoned me, really, I understood then, to see if I could cure the wound Nur's parting shot had left in her mind.

"Is it true, what Nur says? Do Englishwomen indeed make themselves barren? Can you buy devices of that purpose in your cities? Nur says ——" She didn't want to say what Nur said.

"Well ——" I said, hedging.

"Now tell me the whole truth! Is it possible that there are women who deliberately avoid Hope?"

"Yes, it is true, in a way. All Western women don't want—too many children. When they marry later, fully mature, they have more children, more

than they need or can afford to have. They haven't all of them money enough to take care of large families."

"No. That isn't what she said! She said some of them don't have *any* children. She says she doesn't care if she never has a baby. She said her husband's cousin told him ——"

"Don't worry about Nur! She was just trying to annoy you. Of course she looks forward to having children. She said to me ——"

"What did she say to you?" demanded the Rani, eagerly.

"She said—something about wondering if she ought to consult the doctor. She said she was getting on to seventeen, and sometimes she wondered why ——"

"Oh, thank God! She is a good child, really. Did you persuade her to go to the doctor?"

"No, I didn't. I told her not to be in too great a hurry."

The Rani was annoyed with me, and returned to the subject that damned all women like me.

"Is it true, then, that there are foreign women who don't want to have any children?"

"Yes, it is. There are women who aren't maternal."

"Aren't—what?"

"Maternal in their instincts."

She was at a loss to know what to make of such a remark.

"You mean—not real women?"

"Yes, real women. They simply don't want children."

She studied me thoughtfully.

"What do they want?"

"Well, perhaps they want to travel with their husbands."

"Why?" asked the Rani, wondering. She had never seen the bazaars of the city she had lived in for forty years. Perhaps she had never wanted to see them.

"It amuses them. They go to see sights."

"What sort of sights?"

"Mountains! Rivers! As people go on pilgrimages to Mecca."

"For their religion?"

"No, not altogether."

"Why do they want to see rivers?"

"Aren't rivers beautiful?"

"Yes, I suppose they are—in a sense. But not as little children are." She sat looking at me, entirely nonplussed. Her contemptuous incredulity seemed to paralyze my mind, so that I couldn't at the moment even recall the point of view of my own kind. Then the noseless old servant spoke up.

"You can't tell," she remonstrated to the Rani. "Perhaps in the country from which such as she come, there are sights more lovely than a new-born child." What a soaring imagination she had, that disfigured one! But the Rani snubbed her sharply.

"Don't be silly!" she said. And to me, "What

do they do when they aren't looking at rivers and mountains?"

"They play games."

"Games? Are they children?"

"Yes, they are. Our people are always children. They can, many of them, get a lot of fun out of playing games. And of course they do other things."

"Like what?"

"They study. They write books."

"Why?"

"It amuses them. It suits them. In those countries women go about; they couldn't stand being shut up in houses as you are. They amuse themselves."

The Rani sighed suddenly.

"Of course. Poor things! They must be very sad."

"They are not sad! Why should they be sad?"

"Not having babies, would they not be sad?"

"Why should they be sad not having babies, if they don't want babies? They have their husbands. They have their work. You see, it's different in our civilization. Some women get a great deal of joy out of being wives. Their companionship with their husbands is very dear to them, and they don't want it interrupted by children."

Realizing what I said, the old Rani blushed slowly, right up to the top of her forehead.

"You do say the most shocking things!" she murmured. "I didn't mean women of that sort—bad—passionate."

"Neither did I!" I retorted, boldly. I waxed together shameless. "Our religion teaches that it is more important for a man to love and cherish his wife than to have children by her. A Christian man can't take a second wife because his first is barren. Children are not the whole purpose of marriage."

"My God!" murmured the Rani. "No wonder the race is degenerating!"

"It's not degenerating—at least not because our men haven't four wives!"

Then the Queen of Sheba made her first remark in my hearing.

"If a man is allowed to have four wives, a woman ought to be allowed to have four husbands," she said.

The Rani turned upon her in angry Arabic.

"There is no God but God and Mohammed is His prophet!" she cried, with a gesture which made the girl join her in the cleansing creed. "Repent you! Are you blaspheming in my house? I won't have it! Don't let me ever hear such words from your mouth again!"

Bilkis, terrified, was murmuring apologies.

"I didn't mean to offend! I heard Nur ——"

"Don't repeat to me the sins of my daughter! She is—but a thoughtless child! She doesn't know what she is saying, may God forgive her! I warn you not to begin imitating her!"

She glared steadily at the girl, who went on making excuses and fumbling so nervously at the gold stud in her shirt front that it came undone.

"Let me do it up for you," I said. "I was noticing the workmanship."

I leaned forward and looked at the button. The girl's pink breast was half revealed. The Rani, at the sight of it, softened.

"My child!" she murmured. "You perhaps—didn't realize how wrong it is to say such things. You must be careful." And she beamed at me again, having relented altogether. "To think of her so soon giving us Hope!" she sighed.

In a flash I knew what had probably happened in that house as Nur had been leaving. The Rani had likely been going on hour after hour talking about Hope with a capital letter, until Nur, entirely disgusted by her obstetrical refrain, had begun in self-defense talking about contraceptives.

The Rani had likely been sailing on in such indecent haste that Nur hadn't been able to resist the impulse to take the wind out of her sails. Bilkis, as I replaced her gold stud, saw that the Rani's anger had passed, and gave me credit for its passing. And then and there, as I put the golden button back into its place, she handed me, smiling, a loyal affection. I could see her doing it, almost as if her friendship had been a parcel she was putting into my lap. Which Indian woman is not quick to love? Naturally that girl accustomed to a large and affectionate family about her had not been able to find an outlet for her warm-heartedness, having only the Rani and her servants to bestow it upon. Perhaps, too, she had begun to connect me with those blasphemous

doctrines of Nur's which were beginning to take root in her mind. However it was, she begged me to come to see her often. She wanted to be my chum, she said, shyly. The Rani remarked flatly that she didn't want any of my low-caste teachers coming instead of me.

I expostulated futilely. The statement I sometimes had to make about having something else to do besides visiting, annoyed ladies like the Rani. Why should I have anything else to do? Hadn't I servants to do it? Was I a sweeper that I had to look after the cleaning of wards and the washing of bedding! They could understand that the doctor, having a sort of magic, couldn't trust operations and things of that sort to the servants. But why I should put on ignoble airs about having to work they could never understand. The Rani did not believe that there was any adequate reason why I should not spend every morning amusing Bilkis if she wished me to. What did it matter to her that there were fifty other households wanting me to perform for their diversion? Not one of them surely was of so great importance as the Raja's.

I began that spring giving the Raja's bride an hour or two on Friday mornings. The fourth time I went for her lesson, I was received as usual with friendly reproaches for not having come sooner. I explained that the doctor had gone away for a rest, to the hills, and I was very busy. The Rani asked me with sudden interest—we were sitting drinking "sherbet" in the northern veranda of the upper

courtyard that morning—if I was doing the cutting up of people. I said no. She asked me then why the doctor hadn't thought to teach me the art before she went. I said surgery wasn't like knitting. It couldn't be taught in a morning. It had taken the doctor, I explained, more than five years to acquire her skill. The Rani at that moment was standing over me, insisting on filling my pewter cup again with thick syrup. When she heard my answer, she sat down weakly on the bed beside me.

"My God! Spending five years learning to cut up low-castes and pork butchers!"

"Oh, she does sometimes operate on rajas, Rani!" I retorted, humbly. But I had given her such a shock that she sat listening closely to every word I said to Bilkis, the rest of that lesson, lest some way I corrupt her.

Bilkis wasn't quick to learn to read. Before I had gone far with that morning's lesson Rashid was standing there before me, poor old pock-marked Rashid, all dressed up! Her mother, I said, among other inanities, had chosen her new garments with great skill. She replied more spiritedly than usual that the Raja had chosen them himself and given them to her. She wouldn't interrupt the lesson, she said, and she went and took her place at her spinning-wheel, some feet away from us in the veranda. The Rani spoke to her from time to time, and she answered as quietly as ever from the little circle of whirring stillness that the wheel made about her. But I had to notice that, though toward Bilkis, she

seldom looked directly, Bilkis both furtively and openly again and again turned to look at her. Bilkis that morning was perfect in adornment burgeoning in white and soft green silk, her black hair burnished, her cheeks feverishly rosy, the gold wire circlets at her ears threaded fragrantly with white jasmine flowers. Perplexed and timid, her head with its beauty, her eyes with those sweet shadows about them kept turning towards that plain, unassertive woman who sat there enduring. Perhaps it was the girl's fruitfulness that Rashid kept her eyes from beholding. For as the Rani had remarked with a gesture, there was no doubt about the family's Hope now. Bilkis, the Rani said, was going home for a long stay in her father's house, as a young bride ought. Her people were insisting that she be sent at once. Bilkis herself was reluctant to go. And I wondered. Was the distant family really demanding the return of its darling child? Or had the Raja arranged the visit? Or had Rashid in some way achieved her rival's absence? And was Bilkis afraid to leave her new husband alone with that plain woman, that she eyed her so wistfully, so uncertainly? Perhaps I ought not to have wondered about these things, but I did.

I saw little of the family while Bilkis was away. When she came back she begged me to begin her lessons again, though she was often too full of fever to do more than talk languidly to me. The Rani gave me to understand, distinctly, without words, that Bilkis's child was her affair, and she didn't in-

tend letting the doctor have any credit for it. But when the crisis grew near she was so anxious that she lost her courage. She pretended that she had always meant to call the doctor for the malarial confinement.

When the baby was about a week old the doctor said to me one December morning.

"I wish you would go to the Raja's and find out what really is the matter with Bilkis. You sit there until you find out what is going on in that house. You can have this medicine for an excuse. She'll confide in you, maybe. She won't take anything to eat. She lies there and sulks."

"Oh, she does!"

"Yes. She ought to be spanked. You're good at that. You'd think it would be Rashid that would be sulking. Bilkis has won out. She's got the baby and yet she acts like a spoiled child."

"That's all she is! Why shouldn't she act that way?" I thought the doctor was never quite fair to Bilkis, liking Rashid too much. I did as she commanded.

I could smell the Rani's happiness in the street in front of her house. And once inside the courtyard, all the spices of joy and the odors of rejoicing came dancing richly mixed to salute me. Chicken and rice and curry and cocoanut and raisins and saffron were all sizzling and stewing and bubbling in great kettles in the cooking-places, and in smaller ones on brasiers, and the usual servants and strange new ones were discussing with the mistress and the

aunts and great-aunts and unknown hangers-on about stirrings and seasonings and sauces. They caught sight of me.

"Ha! The Miss Sahib!" cried all those gay and piquant cooks. "Bismillah! Welcome, in God's name!"

The Rani came towards me. "You see our state!" she said. "You smell our feastings? Do you hear the walls of the house singing together? Blessed of God, you were long in coming!"

I could have tarried happily for a little among the fragrant preparations, but the Rani, as she gave a peremptory decision about browning onions, was propelling me without a word toward the stairway, the great-aunt and half a dozen others climbing up after us. Bilkis's scarlet-legged bed was in the far corner of one of those khaki-plastered rooms opening off the upper courtyard. She must have heard us coming, but she was lying with her face toward the wall, huddled under a thickly padded cotton quilt, with a soiled veil wrapped tightly about her forehead. The last time I had seen her she had been looking, in spite of her fever, young and strong. Now she seemed as fadedly yellow as the quilt, and exhausted and starved-looking, so thin that it seemed as if only a part of her were lying there. She turned toward me long enough to observe that I was shocked by the change in her, and I observed, before she turned away, that she was glad that I was shocked.

The Rani lifted the baby from the bed, every little fine wrinkle on her old face shining and smil-

ing. He had on a tiny silk shirt and, though it was December, only one coarse cotton cloth about him. Standing close to me, cuddling him warmly against her body, she showed him to me, beaming beams unsurpassed but insufficient, cooing out over him her devout tenderness.

"In God's name! In the name of the Most High I take him up!" She motioned to me to sit down, and came and put the baby in my arms. Then she sat down a few inches away from me on Bilkis's bed, and kept bending toward me as if she was afraid I would let him fall, all the time murmuring and praying.

"Ah, Miss Sahib, how merciful is God! This is a blessed household! I didn't know before that an old woman bowing down to her grave could rejoice as the young rejoice! I used to say, 'Having seen my son's son, I will be complete.' But now I pray to live for this new man's sake. Ah, the little new man, may God increase him! You see how right I was now, in making this marriage! My son must thank me now! He must thank me in his heart! Ah, see him trying to move, the little lamb! Ah, you sweet bit of my soul, how you squirm! You ought to be my grandson's son! But it wasn't your fault, not coming for so long to bless us!"

And I had thought the Rani distant and cold! She went steadily on delighting in her thoroughly Moslem victory, exulting over me in her success. For this was no child, as I must acknowledge, of a western infidel institution. It was a proper Moslem

creation, achieved as became the faithful, in which she had scored, defeating not only the doctor and me, but Nur and education and western civilization in general. If ever wisdom was justified of its first grandchild, surely it was this wisdom of the Rani's! And the women about her were a sighing chorus of congratulation, breathing out satisfaction. The Rani couldn't sit still, so great was her excitement even yet after so many days of the baby. She rose and stood behind me, bending down over my shoulder for yet another look at him. "How good God is!" she kept murmuring. "Ah! How great is His mercy upon sinners!"

She seemed to think that I had had him to handle as long as I deserved, for she took him from me, then, kissing him again and again softly turned to Bilkis.

"His new mouth seeks about for his food, my daughter! His baby mouth desires you!"

Bilkis, at her command, turned over in bed, with groans not too convincing, and the Rani put the child to her breast. "Blessed body! Blessed breast! Food for so kingly a mouth!" she murmured. But Bilkis replied with a peulant moan.

"The fuss she makes about it!" said the Rani, lifting her eyebrows derisively. And then, to appease me, perhaps:

"Of course it is difficult, the first time. But what can you expect! It is God's mercy upon women. Cease your unworthy complaining, my child!" And then, seeing the baby content, a tender-

ness for his nourishment come over her, and she added, almost affectionately:

"It will soon be over, my daughter! You will be well soon, you blessed among women!" And then, to me—perhaps I wasn't enthusiastic enough to please her:

"Watch him! How strongly he refreshes himself! Some babies take it weakly. His father was like that, a vital tugging at my heart, to consume me wholly. This one is like him. You know what you want, don't you, my son! Don't you, my sweet lordling!"

And when the Rani looked at me I saw there were tears in her eyes. I looked at Bilkis. Her eyes were screwed tightly shut and she shuddered. I stood watching her closely for a moment, not convinced she was in any great pain. Then, quietly, Rashid joined us.

I don't know whether she had wanted to come to join in the family rejoicing with me, or whether she had thought it her duty. At any rate, she had come, murmuring humble prayers and benedictions lest in any way her presence harm the newly-born. "How lavishly God pours favors down upon our house!" she said, in answer to my congratulations. And when I properly said, "His special favor be on you, too, Rashid," she only shrugged her shoulders.

There we remained, the four of us, without a word, looking at that mere infant, the Rani blinded by tears; the roughly drawn and dark old aunt sitting on the end of Bilkis's bed, worldly-wise and

mighty, surrendering herself to rather cynical contentment in the spectacle; Rashid careful not to look at Bilkis, wistfully from a little distance watching her husband's baby, its tiny mouth against a breast that was not hers. And as she looked her upper lip twitched ever so slightly—it moved, in fact, almost as the baby's was moving. I wanted poignantly to comfort her. She looked like a good child who has been unmercifully and unjustly whipped. After a little the Rani with a start braced herself to forego the vision.

The days were all so lovably busy now, she explained to me. The conventional charities of a great Moslem house had of course on this occasion been exceeded. All the family kith and kin had been suitably feasted. Three sheep had been killed and cooked for the poor. And now the turn of the hospital had come. She knew I was appreciating the flavor of her benignity. All the hospital staff and our house staff, from myself to the sweeper, were to have a rich fine meal from the Rani's kitchen, in honor of the child we had not bestowed, the Raja himself being obviously as eager to give gifts as he was reluctant to pay bills.

"So you will excuse us," she said to me. "I must myself be seeing to the dinner. I can't trust the doctor's food to mere cooks. You know what servants are, these days! I shall send hers to the house, but you will stay here today and eat yours here with me."

My tendency to agree always with the last

speaker, and to comply with every request, often got me into difficult places. But on that occasion I stood up for myself valiantly. I insisted I couldn't stay the day, that I must eat my dinner with the doctor. The Rani, if I stayed with her, if she had been watching me eat, would have insisted upon stuffing me fuller and fuller, whereas the doctor, if I returned to the bungalow, eyeing me, would wonder why I insisted upon tasting it at all. Finally the Rani agreed to my departing unstuffed, if only I would eat a few oranges and some cocoanut as I sat with Bilkis.

I wanted Bilkis's bed moved out into the sun. "Do I have to obey the doctor as if I was a child?" she protested, sulkily.

"Of course you do! If I have to, why shouldn't you? Everybody in the town has to obey the doctor, when she's ill!" It was always remarks of that sort that proved convincing. She said nothing more as they carried her bed out into the veranda. They set a chair near her for me. I took my place there. She knew the others had gone down the stairs, and yet she said nothing to me.

I tried to cajole her. I told her all the hospital gossip I could think of. I talked about names for the baby. She said shortly that Rashid had named him Akhbar and relapsed into silence. I took a ball of wool from my bag and said I was going to make a cap for her son. Even that failed to excite her interest. I sat quietly a long time. The Rani came up presently to look at the child, and, seeing him

asleep, carried him away, to make Bilkis more comfortable. I seized the occasion to measure the first stitches of the little cap against his head, whereupon the Rani beamed upon me and reproved Bilkis for her rude indifference. After a while Rashid came up to ask me exactly how the doctor liked her pilau—with lots of fat in it, and rather thick with cocoanut, probably? Oh yes, I said, enthusiastically, for by this time the air was positively indigestible with the richness and the sweetness and the spices of the cooking, and I foresaw that later in the day the doctor would sniff the silver trays and the decorated baskets distantly and with extreme suspicion and, after allowing me to partake meagerly, would divide the remainder among the servants with misgivings and compunctions. So Rashid went away to add more clarified butter to the doctor's food, and Bilkis and I were alone again.

It came time for the second dose of medicine.

"I don't want it," said Bilkis.

"I didn't ask you if you wanted it, my little chum! The doctor told me to give it to you. You must get well. You must take it."

"I won't take it—nor anything."

So I said: "Now don't be silly, Bilkis! Brace up. If this was poor old Rashid's baby she would have more sense."

Bilkis turned toward me with surprising strength, and cried:

"It *is* her baby!"

"She'd give her life to have it!"

"She needn't trouble! I have the pain! And she has the baby!"

"What's the use of talking that way? Come on, Bilkis! Be a good girl! I don't know what you mean by such remarks."

"Well, I know! I'll tell you!" Her bitterness burst forth like a torrent, yet she looked about her to see if anyone was within sound of her voice. "Rashid has everything in the world! She has his love! She has his baby! Perhaps in the whole world there will not be found so great a fool as I am! I told my mother he took no notice of me! That he never looked in my direction! And she said: 'Wait till you have a baby! You'll see in what direction he looks then!' She said that when I was at home last, and I was fool enough to believe her! And you know what happened?" She gave a sob, and I knew then that there was no pretense about her pain. "He waited two days to see that I lived to give milk to the child, and then he couldn't stand his joy without her! He went and brought her back from her mother's house, to see his baby—to see their son! And his mother takes it to them, there, my baby, to him there, in her room, and they rejoice together! I say I have a pain inside of me! That night she came home—I woke up, they thought I was asleep, and I heard her crying. I thanked God! And then —he said to her—I heard him! 'Don't you cry, little silly! What does it matter if she bears us ten sons! It it always you that I love!' I tell you I heard something break inside me then! It was

my heart! It hurts ever since. For he spoke in such a voice to her! He doesn't speak so to me. Nor to anyone. But only to her! He speaks to me—otherwise. And when he has finished quickly with me, he goes to sleep in her arms! I wish I had died," said Bilkis. And she wept.

I had stopped knitting.

Presently she began again, her shoulders shaking:

"How does she do it, Miss Sahib? How is it she does it? She won't let one of his thoughts go to me. Not one! She keeps them all. And she is plain! She is pock-marked! Is she not plain, Miss Sahib?"

"She isn't to be compared with you for beauty," I answered, truthfully.

"And she hasn't any clothes! Oh, when I think how I came to this house, last spring, in my wedding garments! And he never looked at me the second time! Weren't they lovely? They had told me I was beautiful! When I remember what I expected, I could die! I could just curse them all and die!"

If you live in the doctor's house you must act on the supposition that everyone ought to live longer. I consoled her as best I could.

"There's no use cursing them," I said. "It isn't their fault." I didn't add, "They didn't want you."

"Is it my fault?" she demanded. "I didn't want to come! I wanted a whole husband, a young one for myself! They said she was old and pock-marked. They said she was nothing! And she is everything! Everything! Sitting there still, never saying a

word, in her old untidy clothes! Miss Sahib, tell me! Isn't Nur right? Wasn't the prophet wrong to say a man could have four wives? Tell me the truth!"

"Of course he was wrong! Every woman in the world knows he was wrong. No one would ever make me believe that a man who says that is a prophet from God!"

She wasn't so ready for cursing and for blasphemies as she had thought. She was afraid and drew back.

"But he said—our prophet—that a man must treat them all alike—all four of them. I am not treated as Rashid is! He has another voice for her."

"Well, if you ask me, that's the worst part of it. If a man treats four women alike, if he doesn't prefer one of them to another, he's a mighty poor man, in my opinion. And if he treated them all alike, they would all four be unhappy. Whereas if he preferred one, that one at least would be happy."

"Oh, God of Light, I say she wouldn't! Not unless he kicked the other three out!"

Seeing her mind working, I said, quickly:

"Take this medicine! Open your mouth!"

She took it before she thought, and then sputtered and protested.

"You must get well," I said. "It is your fate. You needn't fuss about taking the medicine. Why should the doctor be living in this town if it isn't our fate to have her curing us! You'll be as happy—as anything—soon."

"Ah, why should I ever again be happy?"

"Well, women *are* happy, aren't they, when they have babies? You'll get well, and you'll take him home and show him to your father and mother, and everybody in the house will be mad about him. You'll be a great success, and everyone will say how well your marriage has turned out and what a lucky woman you are. They won't know—anything else about it. And he will get sweeter and sweeter! Aren't women always happy with little sons!"

To be sure they are, at least in India. It all turned out as I had surmised concerning the feasts, concerning the future. The doctor eyed the pilaws, oozing fat-soaked cocoanut, with consternation later that day, and exclaimed, "Goodness! What vitality this race has, to survive such food! I wonder if it is safe to give it to the servants. Now don't you be—thoughtless." She never quite forgave me my delight in what she privately called deadly messes. As for Bilkis, she bowed to fate, obeyed the doctor, and little by little regained her normal strength. The young Akhbar grew and increased in weight and temper. He was so captivating that the Rani simply couldn't let Bilkis take him away to her home, though the doctor insisted on her having the benefit

of the finer air of the hills. She found one excuse after another for postponing the visit. It would entirely kill her to give that baby up just then to his other grandmother, she said. But I remarked afterward to the doctor that the Rani had become able to live without the child as soon as she was sure Bilkis was pregnant again.

However, Bilkis didn't stay long away. She said that the change of air had given her such stern and bitter fever that she had insisted on her brother bringing her back to the doctor's care. She was very thin, and perhaps she had longed for the doctor's skill. But when I saw how wistfully her shaded eyes kept glancing at Rashid when she supposed no one was observing her, I surmised that she had had other motives.

Akhbar was four months old by the time she came back. That little strong brown baby was having his bath in the upper courtyard one morning when I happened to be in time for that sacrament. I supposed he had first been washed, for he was lying naked on a bare cot, in the vehement sunlight and his grandmother was rubbing his little soft arms, his fatly wrinkled neck, and his strong little back with olive oil. He was happily sputtering and kicking about, and waving his anointed arms vaguely in fine attempts at conquest, as if he already knew that each gesture and every damp syllable was triumphant. Perhaps he did already know it, for the eyes of the women standing about were beaming down love upon him, and his grandmother was chanting over

him the most passionately tender sort of Moslem baby talk, mingling love with instruction. It was the beginning of the creed he must learn first of all sentences. "There is no God but God,-um-yum-yum-yum-no God but God—hold still one instant, my king!—no God but-yum-yum—what a strong man he is getting to be—no God but God—do you see how he lifts himself, almost—no God but God" and her words faded, at times, away into adoring sighs.

No sooner had they caught sight of me coming up the stairs than they had called to me to join them, if not in the creed, at least in the worship. Bilkis was sitting on the cot, Rashid and the noseless servant and another woman, a genteel but impoverished widowed cousin, and the cook were arguing with the Rani about his clothes. They appealed to me. Didn't I think these garments were suitable for the day? Yesterday he had worn these—they held up tiny trousers of orange-colored cashmere—but here were these new ones. The cook insisted shrilly that for my delight he ought to put on the little hennared ones. They argued and chattered and talked all together as if the fate of the empire depended upon the decision—and really, of course, the fate of the empire does depend primarily upon baby clothes. But the Rani settled the debate peremptorily. Let the new green ones be brought out at once! Emerald green, they were, those absurd little garments. She pulled and coaxed them over the little

soft pink feet, and adjusted them so that they lay in even folds around his legs to the knees, and tied them with a soft red silk girdle about his fat middle. The endearing absurdity of those trousers lay in the fact that they were absent and lacking altogether in the place where Anglo-Saxon tradition considers their presence most essential. Then they pulled down over his head, playing peekaboo, a peacock-blue silk shirt, and made his protesting arms go into its sleeves, and buttoned it with little gold buttons which they found deliciously amusing. They set on his head a little peaked cap of cerise silk, with a soft black fringe across his forehead. Some one suggested that he put on the cap the Miss had made for him. The others derided the idea. Bring that cap at once, so she can see how he has outgrown it already, the Rani said. Look, it scarcely will cover the back of his head now! Bring the antimony, too, till we put circles of the black paste about his blessed eyes, to keep them well and strong! . . . Hold still, my lord, only a second! Hold still, my blessed king! How tired he is getting now! He wants his dinner when he howls suddenly like that!

The child's father, that graceful man, came sauntering across the courtyard and paused for a moment to watch his heir. The noseless servant withdrew a step to make place for him. At that moment the child was lying in Bilkis's lap, really, but his head was on his grandmother's knees, as she was putting the antimony around his eyes. He

didn't like it. He wanted to get to his mother. And just as his father joined the women he gave a fine infant tug and freed himself from the Rani with a cry of rage. "Yanh!" he yelled mightily. Wasn't it too clever of him! Wasn't it too sweet! The women laughed and looked at me to see if I was appreciating the performance. I was noticing that the father was standing nearer Rashid than the others—it had happened so. And he, when he laughed at his son, turned and looked straight at her, at Rashid. She smiled back at him. And Bilkis, who was always watching, saw that married look.

Perhaps in any case she would have done what she did then. She wasn't going to have the world know that she cared. She reached down quickly for the child, and gathered him to her, and hugged him passionately, and kissed his flower-like face. And then she lifted the veil that covered her shoulders, and with a gesture that was imperial, as if no woman before her had accomplished such a feat, she put the child to her breast. And the next moment I saw that out of the corner of her downcast eyes she was noticing which way her husband's feet had taken. Without lifting her eyes she saw that he went on his way down the stair, and she saw, too, that Rashid went in the other direction across to where the water jars were kept in the shade. The morning's event was over. The women went about their tasks. The child slept.

I got Bilkis to talk to me about her home. It was

lovely up there, she said. The mulberry leaves were so beautifully green in the spring. And the peaches and the apricot flowers would be out perhaps by now. Her married sisters had come home with their children to be there when she was, to see her baby. And her brothers' wives were fruitful. One of her nieces was to be married soon. All the land about was her father's, and the women went out into the gardens and fields. There was much friendship and household excitement, up there. It was all so warm, and so affectionate, she said, and tears came suddenly to her eyes. I wished, I said, that she could have stayed longer. I tried to change the subject. But she would explain that it was because of her fever that she came back to the stuffy city and the doctor. Whereupon I remarked that of course she could have lessons, here, too. The baby was asleep. Why didn't she put him down and get her books, and we would read a little while.

But she wouldn't put the sleeping child down.

"He's *my* baby!" she exclaimed, somewhat peevishly.

"Of course he is your baby!" I said, soothingly. But she added, quickly:

"I want him to be *here*, against me, close, when he wakes up. If I put him down, some of them will pick him up, maybe. I'm going to keep him here." Then she looked at me unhappily, and said, significantly, "*You* know!"

The doctor went to that house time after time that

summer. Bilkis's fever upset the baby. The doctor commanded her and entreated her to wean him. But she would not. She didn't want him out of her arms for a minute. He would lie on her lap, fascinated by the shining of those dazzling gold things at her ears. Reaching out for them, his arms grew more and more sure of their movements. He didn't realize what that thinness was that dimmed their luster at first. "All my veils are torn this way, nowadays," she told me, fondly, one morning. She couldn't let him pull her earrings, but she did let him play with her bracelets. He found them soothing to his ambitious gums. He would lie curled up in her lap, a warm but determined little rainbow, and chew away at the smooth round things at her wrists. In August his first white tooth evoked a festival. No lesser word could describe the joy which hailed it. He began to talk, too. At least the women declared he could say Be-Be-e, which meant mother. He said it repeatedly, fretfully and resentfully. It did indeed seem a strange thing that that little Moslem, in his frailty, should have had to suffer alone all that cutting of his flesh, that digging through of sharp little bones, when those women of his and his father and the servants were standing about him in their impotence, eager to suffer in his stead. In his better moments, since they urged him to it constantly, he said the creed. Even that didn't relieve him. Perhaps the prophet didn't understand him. I certainly could not. It sounded to me like la-la-la,

repeated indefinitely, and swelling usually into irreligious howls.

X

Bilkis had great patience with her baby, and I must say I sometimes thought that the household had great patience with Bilkis. Our city is not very far from the hottest place in India. During May, June, and July the heat is intense. If at that season of the year, in our continual war against the surrounding filth and vermin, we find a hospital bed infested with bugs, we have only to put it outside in the afternoon heat to have it thoroughly sterilized by evening. The insufferable part of the day, from two to four, I usually slept away under a *punkah*. The doctor, who always suffered from insomnia, being too tired to read, too tired to study, too tired to forget, would lie awake moaning, or get up and pace about in desperation. In the Raja's house, the women retreated from the upper veranda early in the day, coming down to the cool dark rooms on the ground floor, unsanitary caves into which the sun had never shone. The heat was bad enough for any of us, but for pregnant women it was worse. The Rani, I know, served Bilkis patiently, her thoughts upon the coming child. She went about shutting doors to keep the hot winds out, and opening them in hopes

of a little air. She kept somebody fanning her. She sent servants out hour by hour for fresh sherbets. Ice, at that time, one could get only from the four-o'clock train from Lahore. Bilkis had fever, I suppose, two days a week all that summer. The baby was peevish. He wanted some one to walk about with him, and Bilkis insisted upon doing it herself as long as she had strength to stand. And when she was prostrate, there in the background was Rashid, standing her little wistful distance, her arms, her very fingers, longing to get the baby for themselves. The way she would stand looking at the child ought to have softened Bilkis's heart—perhaps it would have softened it if the heart hadn't been broken. The doctor, too, was always trying to get the baby away from Bilkis. She didn't defy the doctor openly. She just kept on doing what she loved to do, asserting her physical ownership of her baby, the more intensely as she saw him growing steadily up into independence of her. The monsoon rains broke finally, and by the time they were over he was beginning already to want to get out of her arms, struggling to get down on the floor to begin a career of his own.

September passed, and the mornings grew chilly. The women of the household began to devote them-

selves to the dear problem of the baby's winter wardrobe. They spent hours over it. Since they could not do their shopping themselves—perish the thought of such a thing!—they sent servants to the bazaars to bring home patterns of stuffs. Men-servants they sent, and women-servants, and stray young orphan cousins, wards of the Raja's who were allowed in the women's quarters, and even the Raja himself. For the bits of velvets were not the right colors, and the pieces of silk were not rich enough, and the gold braid had not been sewed on in the proper pattern, and the small shoes were of inferior workmanship. They all had to be changed, some of them several times. The infant had glistening velvet coats and silk ones stiff with rich braid, about a foot long, and varieties of little shining caps, and baby turbans—and surely turbans are the most diverting headgear ever donned by the very small. His women would dress him like a sunlit soap bubble, and gaudy raiment, and flowery face, and starry eyes, and scarlet slippers, they would commit him to the old man-servant's arms, and send him out to the men's rooms to amuse his father. But after a short interval—and this I believe was the secret joy of Bilkis's life—they would bring him back fretful and tired, wanting nothing but his mother.

She paid heavily for even that little pleasure, as she found in her second confinement. The day after the new baby's birth, Akhbar on awakening found himself in another bed. He howled long and pitifully for his mother. She was so ill she scarcely

thought of him. The women managed to divert him temporarily. They fed him with milk and they stuffed him with sweets. He howled on, and she realized what the noise was, and would have had him given to her to cuddle him down. But the breast that he wanted she had to deny him. He threw himself about so angrily that they had to take him away. He filled the house with his fury. He would have nothing to do with the servants. He fought with the Rani. He cursed the gay new toys they brought from the bazaar. He wouldn't even look at his father. In despair they tried again in the evening letting him go to his mother. But it was no use. She couldn't endure the pain of his kicking about. He cried himself to sleep in Rashid's arms. He woke there in the morning. Later in the day he saw the new baby with his mother. He fought and he raged another day. It was Rashid who was most successful in managing him. She had a way with him that he, in the end, was not able to resist.

By the time his mother—in the western sense—was about again, the poor lamb understood resentfully and perfectly what had happened. His place had been given to another. In spite of all he could do, his mother would comfort that hateful little new child with what should have been his very own. Bilkis never missed a chance to cuddle him down to her. She was always looking about to see who was tending him. I understood how it was that it seemed to her that Rashid always had him, or was trying to get him. But really, as far as I could see, she took

him only in the course of events, as any one of the women did. Bilkis didn't notice how often his grandmother was playing with him, or how continually the old aunt or the servants slaved for him. She didn't mind them. Their care of him was natural. But I don't think she ever acknowledged to herself that Rashid's interest in him was natural. I noticed more than once that as soon as she saw him with Rashid she managed to pass the new baby on to some one else and get Akhbar for herself. And Rashid was too proud, or she had been too thoroughly humbled, to seem to notice Bilkis's maneuvers.

Akhbar all the time went flashing on from one degree of infant brilliancy to another. He was soon getting about alone on the floor of the courtyard. His father got him a little white hen for his delight, with one wing dyed cerise and the other a fine bright green. He would creep three-legged about after that deliberate and cunning fowl, which pecked away, eluding him easily, since his reach exceeded his grasp. And always some one of his adorers watched over every movement he made, cooing out encouragements when he failed in his attempts. "Come along, little bright king!—Ah, the evil animal!—Will she not wait for the sun?—Ah! did he nearly fall?—My son! My lord! you nearly got her that time!—Go on, you great hunter!—Go on, you mighty man!—God of Truth, that's a corrupt hen!" By the time it got hot that summer, he could catch his bird sometimes.

The new baby—Shafi, he was named—was a pest of a child. He cried in peevish weakness most of his first six months. He had reason to, I will admit, because he had dysentery at once, hives in the spring, and granulated eyelids during the heat. The doctor advised them to try to keep Akhbar away from him. Of course there was never any real isolation. But Rashid took him up to the second story, and amused him there as long as she could at a time. He would look down on his mother through the upper balustrade. Sometimes he would climb up a little way and throw kisses down to her, Rashid or some one holding him securely. And then he would get down and go on playing, quite happy, as she saw, away from her.

One of those stifling mornings I found her walking back and forth in a dark room. Shafi, she told me, had scarcely been out of her arms for three days. He would allow no one but her to carry him. She turned his small face to me to show me in what an ugly red way his poor little lids were swollen. I was sorry for the child, but sorrier for the mother, for I saw that she was almost at the end of her endurance. "Be-be," the child would moan weakly, and she would answer tenderly: "My son! My little son! What can I do for you?" He would cry to her again immediately, and she would murmur to him, "My little child, I would die to ease you, even for a little minute!" "Be-be," he would wail, and she would cry: "Ah, baby! God is cruel! He

will hurt my little baby instead of hurting me! My son, take my eyes! Give me the pain, child!"

Presently she tried to sit down. His crying broke into howls of rage. She got up at once and began walking back and forth again. She was barefooted, and she stubbed her toe against the leg of a bed.

It was the last straw. She flung herself down on the bed and cried angrily, helplessly. I took the offensive baby out of her arms, and the Rani, hearing his screams, hurried in and carried him away. I tried to comfort Bilkis, for she herself was, after all, but a child and a worn and nervously exhausted child. She was only sixteen. Yet as the shrieks of the baby came to us from the courtyard she controlled her tears after just a minute, and sat up, her hand holding the wounded toe tightly. She started to get up to go for her son.

"Let him cry!" I said. "Sit still a minute and rest."

But she looked at me reproachfully, in surprise.

"Why, that would make him worse, Miss Sahib!" she said. "He'll cry himself sick, the poor little lamb!"

And she went and brought him back, with many tender kisses and cajolings, and gave him her breast, her face all tear-stained like his, and walked about with him for a little. And then as he nursed quietly, she sat down with him on the very edge of the bed, her arms moving softly back and forth. I picked up a fan and began fanning her. She protested. She ought to be fanning me, she said. And we talked

very quietly, so that our voices would soothe the child, at whom she kept looking sympathetically.

He was falling asleep, she thought, and we were still for a little while. Then suddenly she looked up at me affectionately, and said:

"I remember the first morning I ever saw you, Miss Sahib!"

I was somewhat embarrassed, for I had been thinking of that very morning, of how strong and beautiful and eager for life she had been then. She had felt me thinking it, I suppose. She perhaps had felt me resenting the abuse of her beauty, her disappointment in life. And I think she couldn't agree with me. That would have seemed to her intense maternity a sort of disloyalty to her baby. She bent down quickly and kissed him cautiously and murmured.

"I *was* strong then. But I didn't have you, my little treasure!"

The Rani came creeping in and saw the baby sleeping. I suggested Bilkis lay him down. But she wouldn't. He hadn't had many hours' sleep in three nights, she said, and she wouldn't take the risk of having him wake as she put him down. Nur came in with Akhbar in her arms. She wasn't a very tender aunt. She wanted her nephew to keep very still for the baby's sake, and he would not. She gave him a little glancing slap on his cheek. It was scarcely more than a pat. He insisted noisily on getting down out of her arms.

"I'm going to my mother!" he said, going out of the door to seek Rashid, apparently.

Nur was too thoroughly conscious of my point of view to let the remark go unnoticed.

"You little devil!" she whispered at him in disgust. "There's your mother, sitting *there*." And she pointed to Bilkis. Akhbar, without taking any notice of her, went on out of the room. He was so small that he had still to climb unsteadily and laboriously over the high door-sill. I changed the subject with great skill, on that occasion being convinced that Bilkis was in no state of mind to discuss disinterestedly the subject of how many women one child may call mother.

I changed the subject really, I suppose, because, like them, I wanted instinctively to minimize the poignancy of the situation. Of course I never really knew what went on in that house, in which, after all, I was always the merest outsider. But that summer I was often there with the women, for a few minutes at a time, and I marveled how well they all seemed to be getting on together. I imagine that even Rashid found her mother-in-law easier to live with, now that she was always busy and happy about the children. The house must have been more stirring and amusing than it had been in its empty days. One day when I saw her and Bilkis laughing together over one of Shafi's rare baby jokes, I said casually to the Rani—she and I were sitting in a darkened lower room, looking out into the courtyard

of the old carved pillars—"Don't those two ever quarrel?"

She looked at me quickly, surprised.

"Why should they?"

"People do quarrel, in the heat."

"Those two don't. Not unless Nur is here to make trouble."

"Western women, two wives of one man, would tear each other to pieces, in a house like this."

"What an ungodly remark!" sniffed the Rani.

"Sharing children this way!" I said, not mentioning husbands. "A western woman wouldn't stand it!"

"Sharing children!" echoed the Rani, half contemptuously. "What an idea! The children belong to the whole family. Bilkis is—irritating, sometimes. She cries. She has too much fever. Do you go and make her stop nursing the baby. She's going to have another one about the time of your Christmas."

I groaned quite loudly.

"Another baby! How can I persuade her! That's your work. She ought not to have another one so soon, I say!"

"The more the better," replied the Rani, serenely. "What do women marry for?"

I was looking at Bilkis as she said it. I longed to say, "I'll be hanged if I know!" But I couldn't exactly get it, in Panjabi. I was, however, approximating to it, when I was interrupted by the Rani jumping up.

"What's the trouble there?" she called, sharply, to the noseless servant. "Why are you keeping your master waiting? Haven't you any regard for the poor lamb! Akhbar, my heart-itself!"

She had run out to the poor lamb, who was shrieking and kicking about on the floor of the court. Rashid had arrived quickly at the same spot, and was gathering him up into her arms. Bilkis, with the baby, reached him a second after, and his oldest auntie practically at the same time. But he wouldn't be taken up. He threw himself about in the dust, screaming with disappointed rage. I hadn't until then realized that the ice-cream hawker, passing down the street, had been calling his wares outside the door and had gone on, discouraged. But how clever it was of the child, the women said, to understand that the voice was getting farther away! They all began cursing the servant together. She was the only one who could go outside to buy the stuff, and she had been kneading bread in a brass pan on the floor when Akhbar told her to hurry. She had had to get up, wash her hands from the dough, and find the veil which she had thrown aside in the heat while she worked, and she hadn't done it all promptly enough.

"I don't know what the world is coming to, with servants like you! In my mother's time I've seen such a woman crucified—keeping her master waiting about so!" The Rani glared after the apologetic woman, and all four of them stood there angrily describing the outrageousness of her behavior, assur-

ing Akhbar he would get his desires fulfilled. He let himself be cajoled. He stopped his howling. They wiped away his tears. Rashid picked him up and went carrying him toward the door, and met the servant with three messes of the deadly adulterated stuff wrapped up in dusty banyan leaves. She struck at the servant, as if she intended hitting her, assuring the child that so all his neglecters would be punished. He was pacified, and sat down between Rashid and his mother and devoured it all. The scene was over in a minute or two—the ice-cream had disappeared. We could go on with our conversation.

Naturally I had to ask the Rani for an explanation of her exciting sentence.

"You don't mean to say you have seen a woman —crucified?"

She said casually that she had. She seemed surprised that the fact interested me. I listened to her, afraid. She had gone with her brother to her grandmother's when she had been about eight years old. It was up toward the frontier, among the foothills. A man and a woman slave ran away together. They hunted them, and brought them back, and decided to crucify them. "There was a hill there, and from the roof we could see it all. We had to turn our eyes away," she said, "but their cryings and their agony filled all the house. They coudn't go on with it, she yelled so. They had to let her down. She was never any use after that. Her hands were all broken. But the man they killed." The Rani was annoyed at my horror. "I've forgotten how they

killed him. He just died, as far as I can remember." She refused to say any more about it. "We had good servants in those days," she said.

And then the woman selling vegetables came in and put her basket down from her head. Akhbar ran and selected the longest green cucumber for himself, the one much longer than all the others—I won't say it was a yard long, but it was certainly two feet long—and he didn't wait to have it peeled. He just began on one end of it. Unitedly they besought him to abandon it. He refused, absolutely. They tried to bribe him. They would send to the bazaar for sweets, for a great pile of sweets. But no. He wanted cucumber. They coaxed him to wait at least till they peeled it and rubbed it with salt. They said the doctor would come and beat him. At that, the little black-eyed tyrant, quite still, listened for a second toward the curtained door into the outer court, then looked cautiously around him and pointing to me, triumphed:

"That one alone, today."

Wasn't he clever! How they did admire him! To understand so clearly at so tender an age that he need fear no punishment from me! They kissed him and patted him and changed the subject as quickly as possible, to get away from the memory of that gruesome afternoon of the week before when the doctor had, quite without warning, picked up the heir of the house and spanked him, before their very eyes, before the eyes of his grandmother.

From the doctor's point of view, it had been

simply an unpleasant professional duty. The child for a fortnight had been having dysentery and fever, and she had come to the conclusion that if his life was to be saved he must change his ways, that is to say, he must, for a little at least, refrain from poisonous ice-cream, cucumbers, green bananas, and sweets fried in deep fat. He must drink milk and he must take quinine. Her orders, she found, could be carried out only in her presence. The moment her back was turned, the family was helpless before its firstborn. The afternoon that her patience came to an end, she had spent a long hour with the imp, to get him to take his quinine, and then departed in haste. She had returned instantly, having forgotten something, and spied Akhbar exercising the right common to Indian children, of emptying the stomach at will. She had seized him forthwith and spanked him, in a mild but thoroughly spinsterly and New England fashion. It was over in a moment, almost before the Rani and his mothers could avert their faces from the spectacle.

Since that day the little king had not reigned quite so securely. He felt constrained, when a certain person was mentioned, to listen toward the curtain for fear she might be entering. He couldn't be sure that his subjects wouldn't do what they were always threatening to do if he got too naughty. How could he defend himself when his treacherous slaves, those creatures of soft bosoms and respectful beseeching tones, might hand him over to this being who, instead of soft veils, had a great stiff hat on her

head, who had glasses instead of worshiping eyes, and stiff white shoes instead of twinkling tinted feet, whose dozens of mighty arms held him tight while her dozens of hands pried open his mouth with a spoon, indifferent to his teeth, and held his nose firmly till he had to swallow. No cajoling "Lord of my life!" from that thing! No caressing, "Sun of my heart!" from her! Only—oh so flatly! "Akhbar, open your mouth! Swallow this! Do as I tell you! Keep it down!" speaking to him as if he were a woman! Like the good little Moslem that he was, he had submitted to fate. But he knew which one of us was his fate. And I wasn't that one. Before me he resumed the cucumber. I departed, humbled.

But out-of-doors, he could not be so sure. And that was why, that autumn, English ladies passing along the road beneath the cathedral trees in front of the hospital were sometimes surprised to see a wonderful baby bobbing along on a pony led by an untidy groom, a kind of infant prince in a gold-braided purple velvet coat, with a regal rosy turban framing his innocent face, a small wretch who, as they drew near, stuck out his tongue at full length and held it patiently out till they had passed. This Akhbar did not from political prejudice or racial scorn, but simply because he imagined, the little goosey, that all English ladies were possessed—like the doctor—of an inordinate desire to see his tongue, and he didn't intend running the risk of displeasing them—not after that spanking.

One morning I found, as soon as I entered the courtyard, that I had arrived at the wrong moment. Bilkis had been crying till her eyes were red and swollen, but she insisted with the Rani that I should stay. Seeking about for an innocent subject of conversation, I asked exactly the most provocative question:

"Where's Akhbar this morning?"

Bilkis answered, bitterly:

"He's gone with his mother! He's gone with Rashid!"

"Where? To her home?"

"Yes! To her home!" She began to cry. "To Pindi. A distant place! And she'll stay a month. They went early this morning! They are on the train now! And God knows what may happen to him! His father will buy him sweets every time the train stops, and he will get fever, and the doctor won't be there to look after him! And you know how those train windows fall down on babies' hands! They break their bones! I saw it happen once! And Akhbar is always trying to open the windows and the doors. I heard a woman tell how a baby fell out of a train! I see my son getting hurt every moment!"

"Oh, Bilkis," I protested, "you mustn't worry so! His father will watch him every minute! They will take care of him. Rashid will look after him as ——" I was about to say—"as if he were her own." Bilkis understood and said it for me.

"He *is* her own! He *always* was! And so will Shafi be, soon!"

"Pindi is a bracing place. The change will do him good. He'll come back fat and rosy," I said.

"I don't want him fat and rosy! I want him here, with me!"

"When's he to be back?" I asked the Rani.

"He'll be back, with his father, day after tomorrow," she answered, shortly.

"He will not!" Bilkis protested, angrily. "He will stay till she comes. You mark my word! His father wouldn't be able to make him leave her, if he'd try, even. I tried to coax him to stay with me, but he wouldn't. I told him he was mine. But he said—he said, 'That *crying* baby is yours!' I wish I had died before he was born!" She spoke like an agonized mother, but she cried like a petulant child.

I'm sure some people would have thought of very fine consoling things to say in such a position. But I couldn't. I sat dumb, making faces to amuse Shafi, who was fretting in his mother's arms. I must say it gave me a sort of satisfaction to see Bilkis for once excited over a situation which to her world seemed so unworthy of comment. I inquired later of the noseless servant in the street, one day, if the child had returned. He had not, she said, shrugging. It was indeed six weeks before Rashid returned with him, as Bilkis had prophesied.

I realized at a glance, when I saw him again, that Rashid had taken good care of him. The air of the north had agreed with him, for he was strong, and

almost rosy. Compared with western children he was a precocious two-year-old. The house he kept now in an uproar. There had been a time, before he went to Pindi, when if he sat down in the sun with a piece of whole-wheat bread covered thickly with brown sugar, big black crows would come perching on the wall, waiting for a chance to snatch it out of his baby hands. But now—oh, Akhbar didn't so much as allow one stray crow to alight on a wall belonging to him! Scarcely would a bold black creature settle its wings down before he had thrown a pewter drinking-cup at it, or a piece of dried fuel-manure, or one of his shoes—whatever thing came first to his purpose. And once, the women averred, he had hit his crow.

His father, when he came back with Rashid from Pindi, got him a fat-tailed lamb, to be fattened even more grossly for sacrifice at the approaching feast day. It was my opinion that the animal would have put on flesh more rapidly if Akhbar had been less intent upon coercing it into games with him. As far as I could see—which wasn't very far, to be sure—the lamb and the child were always at opposite ends of a taut rope, trying to pull each other about, in one long young tug-of-war, and Shafi, who crawled about underfoot, trying to imitate their maturity, would have suffered if he had had fewer women to follow about, watching over him tenderly. The lamb, as it grew fatter, became more difficult to haul about, but it became, too, less agile, while Akhbar grew day by day more powerful. He had

mastered it before its end, and after making it go wherever he would, he would draw it to himself and embrace it fondly, burying both his hands in its long dirty wool.

If it had been a boy that was born to Bilkis at the time of the feast, two other lambs were to have been sacrificed in thanksgiving. But it was a daughter. So the fat one sufficed. The noseless servant said that the Raja swore when he heard it was a girl. But the Rani said that in his heart he was very happy about it. For a man, she explained to me, is always happy, though he may not acknowledge it, if even a calf is born in his house. And they also told me, those women, and even the Rani couldn't help smiling about it, that Nur, when she got the news, written to her on a post-card by the Raja's learned servant, had sent her brother a telegram of enthusiastic congratulation.

"It was sheer impertinence of her," said the Rani.

The house was unusually interesting to me just then, infuriating and amusing. What sickened me was to see Bilkis dying bit by bit, as her children lived.

She had been barely seventeen when she gave birth to this third baby, and her fecundity had become, I think, like Rashid's sterility, pathological. For the same reason, it may be, that Kali has four arms, for the same exuberant reason that the Hindu pantheon could not content itself with less than eighty million gods, because of the climate's passion for increase, her young body had continued to

function triply for three years. The lunar rhythm whose cessation should have been the symptom of her condition had continued regularly while she nursed one baby and carried another. The fading of her physical bloom was but a slight thing compared with the effect of the premature strain upon her imagination. Frustration, which had ennobled poor old Rashid, had never had a chance to do its perfect work upon her mind. At a time when she should have been looking forward to life there was nothing left for her to look forward to. She was not one, in my opinion, who had known the worst of life too young. She was more unfortunate. She had known the best of life too young, before her intelligence had developed sufficiently to appreciate it. Her mind, like her eyes and her shapely lips, had become dull. I had seen this happen often before, of course. But other young mothers seemed to have a more secure joy in the babies who robbed them of their childhood. And besides, Bilkis had been such an unusually fresh and lovely flower of a girl.

The thing that amused me in those women was the sort of love which they poured forth continually in strong torrents over that little girl. I never imagined that they could be more pleased by any baby than they had been by Akhbar. And I suppose that if the little girl had not followed securely her two brothers, she wouldn't have evoked such a quality of tenderness. They called her simply Fatma—a name among Moslems which is like Mary among Christians, common everywhere, and good enough for the

greatest. It seemed as if the little leech had absorbed into her being the last drop of her mother's vitality. To me, of course, she was naturally a more interesting baby than her brothers had been. Akhbar was handsome enough, in a heavy-lidded, full-faced, stolid sort of way. And Shafi, always ailing, was peevish and sallow, a child who endeared himself only to those who had to make him go on living. But that little Fatma—any western woman would have admired her. She was very fair, like her mother, and she had shining gray-brown eyes, and she kicked and cooed almost from her first month in irrepressible joy. By her fourth month she was a practiced coquette. Her soft light hair had grown into brownish little curls all over her head. I had never seen an Indian baby with hair so blond, but Bilkis said, shrugging, that all her family had hair like that, which later became "merely black." And she would lie in Bilkis's lap and make eyes at the world, puffing out her cheeks and sputtering with her lips, and looking out of the corners of her eyes demurely, under her long lashes, to see who was admiring her efforts—as her mother watched her father's departing feet. She had inherited, as well as her mother's beauty, the bodily vigor of her grandmother, who had withstood so many illnesses, and the mental alertness of her Aunt Nur. Certainly, for any sweet little baby trick the boys had ever learned she learned three. She invented any number of ways of attacking her rosy feet, of peeking through her dimpled fingers, of getting her hands

on her mother's earrings. But it was not because of her beauty that they hung over her. "A lot of good her beauty will do her!" Bilkis said to me one day, bitterly. It was because she was one of themselves, that pitiable thing, a woman, that they protected her so passionately from the risks she naturally ran from her ungentle brothers.

Their sympathy with her sex scored for myself and Christianity a great triumph one afternoon in that orthodox upper veranda. I had been holding her, and there had occurred one of those somewhat dampening accidents that simply will happen in the most securely diapered of nurseries, especially to those who have no great skill in these matters, and wee Fatma, of course, had never heard that there were such things as diapers in the world. The women had risen in haste and consternation. They called for a servant. My frock must be washed at once. Would I take it off, they asked, chagrined.

But there were only one or two very small spots on my skirt, hardly visible. I made light of them. I spoke, as it were, dryly of them.

"In my country," I said—you never know what turn theology will take next in the subtle, the mystical East—"in Christian countries we make no more fuss over a baby girl's accident than over a baby boy's."

"What!" they cried. "Is it not more defiling? Not among Christians?"

"No, not a bit," I said, serenely. "We make little distinction between them at four months. They and

their defilements are equal at that age. A girl is no more deadly than a boy."

"And a good thing it is!" cried the surprised Rani, that keen polygamist. "Why should a blessed girl like this one be of lesser degree than a boy? I must say your religion has its points!"

She took the baby from Bilkis, and held it between her hands at arm's length, so that she looked up at it. And then she clasped it tightly against her bosom and kissed it passionately, over and over.

"Oh, you flower of my seed!" she cried. "You beautiful fruit of my body! My twice-removed blossom! Little child of my little child!" She referred poignantly to her share in the child's creation. She called to mind her conceiving of her son. That day, and many others, I wished I had a notebook to take down the endearments that the Rani poured out over that baby. She was like an artist when the right subject calls forth from him the perfect expression of his thoughts. She brought forth out of the treasures of her emotions one exquisite idiom after another, words that women keep wrapped away in their hearts, and hand down carefully generation after generation. I did remember some of them, and tried one or two of the more decorous upon my old language-teacher. He threw up his hands in despair. "God grant you may forget that! You talk like a woman! Do you think to pass an examination with phrases of that sort? Could a man utter such a thing?"

Even Nur was moved by her niece. "Oh, Miss

Sahib, when I see a baby like this one, I wish I had a dozen of them myself!" she cried to me, the day of my triumph. What she said to the child was wonderful and far more translatable than the Rani's endearments.

"Oh, come to me, thou brilliant little passer of examinations! Come to me, thou B. A. Pass! Bilkis, your daughter was born to come out first in exams, to take degrees! She will be the head of her class. I can see that. Oh, baby, thou shalt have many books! Thou shalt go forth to see the world! Thou shalt be great, and go to meetings, and talk with the wise. Thou shalt have a little slate and pretty pencils and learn all wisdom. Thou shalt choose thine own husband, as the English do. Yes, thou shalt! Thy father's sister says so! Thou shalt have a motor car and a camera. And many young men shall come to admire thee. And thou shalt look at them all and choose the best one, according to thy desire, as English women do! Yes, thou shalt do so, thou great clever M. A. scholar!"

"Goo! Goo!" gurgled the baby, enthusiastically.

"Look, Bilkis! She's a scholar already!"

"Stop talking such nonsense, my daughter!" called the Rani, sharply. "Your brother will hear you."

"Oh, baby, thou great M. A., we don't care who hears us, do we, thou child of papers and pens! We don't mind him, do we, studier of English!"

And Bilkis sat looking at Nur wistfully.

"Will books really make her happy?" she asked.

"Oh yes!" cried Nur, convinced. "Women who know how to read are always happy."

"I suppose it is their fate," sighed Bilkis. She looked at her daughter. "Poor little lamb!" she said.

"That's English she is trying to speak now! That's books she is trying to say!" murmured Nur, kissing her. "Oh, how I wish I had one like you!"

THE next year, when the doctor's sabbatical leave was due, and the forty-day fast continued through April, the fierce heat of summer began before March was out shrivelling up the blossoms of the first doctor's tea-roses—though usually their tiny buds hadn't shrunk to hat-trimming proportions until the first of May. Whatever month of the year the fast began, it always filled our wards to overflowing, and that year, with the heat inflaming more brutally than usual all the poor little dirty fly-bitten eyes and rendering corrupt all the unwashed sores of the reeking city, we had to walk about carefully in the hospital compound to avoid stepping on patients. The doctor, although warned by her friends of the heat of the Red Sea in May, stubbornly delayed her departure. She refused to leave her work to an Indian assistant who had been expecting her seventh

baby for a month, and an American doctor in charge of a hospital a hundred miles away. The Indian assistant was a very jewel, unfortunately not very well trained, but thoroughly trustworthy within her limitations, the patient wife of a Christian clerk, the imperturbable mother of a family whose sturdiness did her vast credit, an owl-eyed, round-faced dark woman, who wore a proper white Indian veil and western glasses, who combed her hair and oiled it as smoothly as a Moslem matron, and wore a western skirt and blouse and shoes. She had learned to speak the language of her illiterate patients really charmingly, and she commanded a great deal of confidence from them. But—assume the responsibility of that institution until the doctor returned? Nothing would induce her to consider it!

What? Manage those independent young nurses? Train them for their government examinations? Oversee the compounder? (There was, of course, no place in the city to buy the prescribed medicines, and so all out-patients got their doses handed out to them from the dispensary window.) Order the medicines? Do the minor operations? Take the obstetrical cases? Oversee the food for the in-patients and the staff? Make out the government reports? Satisfy the government inspectors? Account for the mission's money? See to the repairs of the roofs after the rains? Mrs. Rallia Ram was an obliging woman, but the very thought of it made her write a draft of her resignation.

So I was to be left in charge. I couldn't resign.

The real doctor only a hundred miles away reassured me. It was nothing, she said. She would come down any time I telegraphed for her. Mrs. Rallia Ram was competent. And the English civil surgeon was sure to be helpful—as far as the conventions of the women allowed him to be. And the doctor was leaving everything in the most perfect order, getting as much done beforehand for me as possible.

It was all very hurried, all that preparation, very confusing and exhausting, and of course with so much on hand we ought not to have mentioned having a great farewell party. But it was early in March when we decided upon it, before we knew what a fierce heat was to descend upon us. And if we hadn't decided to have the party in our own way, the hospital staff would have had it in their way, which would probably have been more trying. As it was, we invited everybody, vaguely and generally, to a grand *purdah* party before the doctor left—*purdah* being a word for curtain that we used to express the sum of conventions restricting veiled women. I can't say how much we wished we might withdraw the invitation later. The doctor had to do all the morning clinics without Mrs. Rallia Ram. In the afternoon we had often to give up the hour's rest which seemed more desirable than a whole night's sleep, to accounts and terrible government forms with blank spaces to be filled in. In the evening she had to run about the city, paying professional visits. And all the time there was Taj, that

mistress of importunity, praying for our help, her hands clasped about our feet.

She appealed to us first at lunch time, one day, when the house was tightly closed against heat and visitors for the afternoon. We were sitting at the table, dutifully stuffing food into our reluctant mouths, when she made her way in to us, through the panty door, in spite of our servant's protest. She pulled off her stifling white outer cape, threw herself down on the floor between us, and began to weep bitterly, too bitterly to explain the reason of her grief.

She had Theodore-Indeed with her, and he seemed well. He was four and a half years old, and, strange to say, petted and pampered as he was, he was a wistful sort of little lad, with a delicate face more Hindu than Moslem, and wide innocent round eyes that had thin long lashes. His neck and shoulders were very thin. He had been crying, too, and began again when I appealed to him to tell us what the trouble was. So I hastily put my arm around him and drew him close to my chair and told him he wanted a biscuit spread with jam, which I was going to prepare for him. He recovered his composure at once, and I said:

"Come on, now, Inayat-Ullah, tell us why the mother weeps."

He sniffed and said:

"My father is taking a second wife to himself."

The doctor and I spoke together.

"A *what*?" we asked.

"Yes!" blurted out Taj, with him. "Yes! A second wife!"

We looked at one another in amazement.

But Taj had broken forth into new weeping. The explanation seemed to rest upon her son. He lifted his bony little shoulders, and shrugged his hands, and said simply:

"God knows. My own head swims. I can't understand these matters." He looked at his mother and said, "Don't cry, my mother!" And then he sniffed, and took a bite of the biscuit. He chewed it a second. "God knows," he repeated, disconsolately.

"Well, of all things!" exclaimed the doctor.

"Are you sure of this, Taj?" I couldn't believe it.

She had suspected it yesterday, when a neighbor's servant came and told her of the rumor. And she had asked him, and he had said yes. And then she had died. The life went out of her. She hadn't really breathed since. She heaved a great sob and cried:

"Don't let him! Don't let him! Make him stop, Miss Sahib!"

And that absurd request she kept making to us both, day and night, for a fortnight. We protested uselessly that it was none of our business. We explained a hundred times that we had no authority over Babu Fazl Alahi. If we had none, then God had none, Taj cried in answer. There was no one living to whom he was so greatly indebted as the doctor, no one he would so respectfully listen to.

To whom else could she appeal for help, if we refused to act? And on and on she went. It may seem absurd enough to those who do not know the burden of the heat, and of such importunity, that we even considered interfering in such an affair. We acted merely in self-defense, because we couldn't just kick Taj out of our path and go on. Finally the doctor sent for the father of Inayat-Ullah.

By that time we had heard more of the reasons and circumstances of the proposed marriage. At first we had asked one another why in the world that silly old idiot, now that he had a son, wanted another wife, when in the days of his childlessness he had not apparently considered a second marriage. And then we were told that he had come into some little money. And people said that naturally, being a little freer financially, he would indulge himself in another woman—as a man constrained by economy to a Ford, coming into wealth, would likely get a better car. The women in the hospital discussed it resentfully day by day, for Taj was usually weeping there of a morning. They discussed it uneasily, each one of them wondering if it would be her turn to weep next. Those who were first or chief wives among them said unanimously that it was an evil, a wicked injustice; those who were second wives said, shrugging, that it was fate. It interested me at that point to discover how polygamous our city really was, for upon inquiry, which lasted with unabated vigor for some days, I was unable to find, with the exception of some immature girl wives like

Nur, a single woman who had not herself been divorced or whose husband had not divorced some wives, either before or since her marriage. They all seemed to agree that Taj, having produced a son in her comparative old age, should have been spared this humiliation—for they were one in calling the second marriage a humiliation. They said it showed how degenerate the age had become when a man like Fazl Alahi took a second wife—after God's favor to him. And such a wife! They clicked their tongues and pitied him. They advised Taj not to worry; he would get what he deserved from her, they said.

He came to the bungalow as soon as he got our summons, with eager respect. He said he was sorry not to have told us of his marriage first himself. He said that we were his father and his mother. He said that we were the government, the British Empire, the American Mission, the source of mercy. He said he was our obedient servant, and our least command should be obeyed. He craved permission to explain the circumstances of his marriage.

We had received him in the drawing-room—the doctor had asked me to be there—at six, one stifling evening. The doors of the room had just been opened, one onto the dusty veranda, one onto the dry burned garden, and the air came in like dull gusts from an oven. The doctor in the professional white uniform she always wore, was sitting up straight and stiff in a Morris chair, because she was too weary to sit restfully, fanning herself nervously with a

little native straw fan the shape of a battle ax, and down her forehead, beneath her limp curls, little streams of sweat kept running. Her face was gray with fatigue, she was haggard, and her eyes were too bright. To me she looked small and weak and insignificant compared with the culprit. He must have been about twenty years older than she was, and he was a large, well-built, broad-chested man who filled out his white garments ponderously. I wondered if he had hurried home from his office and changed all his clothes for our benefit, for he was in immaculate white raiment, his trousers not full like the Raja's, but cut almost like Englishmen's. His turban, too, was very business-like—a white one with blue lines and checks in it. He had a large, frank-looking face, a rather noble forehead, a beard dyed red with henna to lessen the effect of the heat upon his skin—at least old men always say it is not for beauty, but simply for comfort, that they dye their whitening hair red or blue as the fancy takes them—and he carried himself with great dignity. Altogether he was quite an imposing person, this man whose father and mother we were. He insisted upon sitting in a little woven cane chair, gone somewhat awry, which I feared was scarcely strong enough to carry his weight. He thought, I understood, that he was showing deference to us by refusing to have a more honorable seat. He had come in holding Theodore-Indeed by the hand, but I had sent the little lad to the hospital on an errand. I didn't see why we should discuss this

marriage before him. The doctor and I had conferred about what we were going to say, and accordingly I began boldly:

"You know, Babu-ji, we were extremely surprised to hear of your approaching marriage, because, some way ——"

He interrupted me with apologies. It had been his great desire to break the news to us himself, before any one else should have told us.

"Because," I said, firmly, "some way we usually think of you as being—one of ourselves, almost—in matters of honor, you know, ever since you have been made head of your department."

This was really cunning of me, because the man's reputation for integrity—did not everyone say he was the best man in our city?—depended upon a scandal which had occurred some years before in a subordinate government office, the investigation of which had proved Fazl Alahi, alone among the Indian clerks involved, an honest and honorable servant of the king. He was gratified by my remark and said he was but a poor man to be so characterized by persons of our position.

"It seems strange to us that you should now condescend to a marriage of this sort—this lower sort," I said.

"Your honor," he protested, "I have been wanting to explain it to you from the beginning. I fear the mother of my son may not have caused you to understand the situation thoroughly. It never

occurred to me," he said, somewhat regretfully, "that she would not be more sensible about it."

"Didn't it, really?" I looked at him curiously.

"No. I never thought she would so forget herself," he said.

"Really! I had thought you less—stupid," I murmured, and let it go at that.

"You see, it is like this," he began, wiping his nose on the end of his turban's tail. "It is a family duty which I am undertaking. This course devolves upon me because of the curious history of my family. My grandfather had three sisters. Strange to say, they each married into a distant part of the world. The oldest married a man whose business took him often to the northern border, to the Khyber Pass. You know the heat and desolation of that part. They settled there, and their Cabuli descendants ——"

The doctor, listening with all her might, looked nervously at her wrist watch.

The descendants of his grandfather's second sister —she married down Delhi-way—intermarried with these northerners, and the third sister, whose life was most romantic and strange of them all ——

The doctor began to wonder if she was understanding Urdu. "What's this all got to do with Taj?" she asked me.

And presently I had to ask him pointedly the same question. He was just coming to that, he said. This uncle who had but recently died, whose prop-

erty he had inherited, he was the offspring of the Karachi branch of the family, and that being so, we must acknowledge that there was simply nothing left for him to do but to marry his uncle's widow.

I was rather nonplused by all this, because I had always thought he was a member of a caste of fisher folk, or at least river folk, rather humble people. And besides, I didn't believe that Moslems usually marry their deceased uncles' widows. I said as much, and he replied that I was quite right, but in a case like this, when a man's grandfather's three sisters ——

The doctor hadn't time for all that again.

"Am I to understand that your duty to your Cabuli granduncle is more important to you, then, than your duty to your son?" she asked, not very idiomatically, but very succinctly.

"Oh no!" he said. "Never!" His son was first to him of all living.

"Yet you are planning to impose a superfluous stepmother upon him, the poor lamb, because of some dead merchant!"

How could that hurt a child, he asked, genuinely surprised.

"It's not good for any child to have a stepmother as well as a mother, living together in one house. It's the wrong atmosphere."

He could not understand at all what we meant.

With the natives these things adjust themselves easily, he assured us. With white people it would

of course be another matter. But it was the custom of their religion. Besides, if the women quarreled, the lad could always escape their tongues by retreating to the men's quarters. And who knew—he wasn't sure yet whether both wives would live in the same house, now that he had both houses and a great deal of property.

It annoyed me to hear him referring so to his new wealth, his ancestors so suddenly grown with it into importance.

"It seems to me that usually these things adjust themselves very badly indeed," I commented. "I have never seen a family in this town, never since I have lived here, in which another marriage, another mother, made for the happiness of the women or the children. It will not be good for the lad to see his mother relegated to second place."

"He won't mind it in the least."

"His mother minds it! He will see her unhappy."

He reasoned with me respectfully, giving me flattering titles. He felt sure that if I understood it was his religious duty, I would urge him to it.

"Are you keeping the fast?" I asked.

Certainly not, he said. A man like him, with regular hours in a office, how could he keep the fast?

I supposed he rose for early prayers, instead?

He said he had done so occasionally when he was younger. But now he needed a clear head and much sleep, for his work.

So I said: "As a matter of fact, you never say an inconvenient prayer, you never carry out a precept of your religion which involves any effort, but you avail yourself of all its privileges you find convenient."

He looked at me thoughtfully. He supposed I was right. Yes, certainly I was right. He said any sensible man would get as much out of his religion as he could. He regretted that we didn't know enough of the customs of Indians to see that his grandfather's three sisters —— But why should he go over all that again, when the marriage was already consummated. He prayed that as the mission's mercy had always watched over his son, it might now safeguard his further offspring.

I must say that that announcement annoyed me.

"There's no use inflating ourselves with words," I said. "Our respect for you isn't going to be what it has been. You can't expect decent western women to approve of such a marriage. Taj has been a good wife to you"—I said that then, although at first I had said to myself that I didn't much blame him for wanting a less lazy woman to serve him—"and as a matter of fact, you know you have said again and again that the English standard is better than the Indian in these matters ——" I wasn't sure he had indeed said that, but I thought it likely. "You know in a country like this, where there are more men than women, there is no justification for such a marriage. I feel extremely sorry for Taj."

"Alas!" he sighed. "We are indeed cursed by our religious tradition."

We dismissed him. Taj all the time had been waiting behind the fig trees in the garden, and as soon as she saw him go out of the gate she came in, holding the son by the hand. She had brought him back from the hospital.

"Taj, I knew it would be no use, our talking to him! We couldn't do anything, at this hour. What's this he says about it being his duty to marry this woman?"

"You didn't believe that? So that's the lie he chose to tell you!" She laughed a very nasty laugh, with a sob before and after it. "Why didn't you ask him about the other widow of his uncle, the old cross-eyed one? Why is it not his duty to marry that one, instead of the scrawny little viper? Why is he shipping the old one off to her father's house, and keeping the young one? Why is he—the two of them—marrying off the widowed daughter of the uncle without proper state, to a poor man, to avoid giving her proper provision? Tell me that! The liar!"

"You can't do anything more now but make up your mind to endure it. It's settled now. The wedding is over."

She denied it, moaning. She said she knew for sure it had not taken place yet. She wanted us still to prevent it.

I said she wouldn't have to live in the house with the viper. She would still have her own little place.

But she shrieked afresh at the thought. Was she to be left in that little old cheap two-roomed house alone while he sported with his new love in a brick palace of paved courtyards and stories rising above stories, she demanded of the heavens. She called God to witness that the prophet had decreed that both wives were to be treated alike.

If she had a house to herself, she could look after the child as she had always done, I tried to console her. But she sobbed and said that his father wouldn't do without him for a moment, not a moment, and she would die if he was taken from her for the length of one breath. She would be afraid to leave him with that women for the winking of an eye. That viper would probably kill him; she was sure to poison him.

I was severe with her. And then I tried patience again. I reminded her that she had told me herself that she had often suggested him taking a second wife.

But she wept piteously, and said that she had urged that course in the days of her happiness with him only because she was sure he would not act on her advice.

She wept on our veranda that evening until after ten. We couldn't ask her to stay the night, properly. Fazl Alahi appeared, himself, then, and picked up the sleeping child from her lap, threw him over his shoulder as if he had been a sack of meal, and walked away with him. Taj rose up and followed

him, running along with little steps, sobbing and moaning.

The Raja's family at that time was being stirred by events almost as exciting as Taj's difficulties—but events of the opposite sort. The Rani was recovering from an illness that might well have been her last. She had certainly been brought through it, brought out of it, by the tremendous new interest she had in life. She had been saved by Hope, with a capital letter, Nur's Hope. For now, after her five barren years, Nur's turn had come, and she was glad. The Rani had really enjoyed those regular frequent visits of the doctor which her illness had necessitated and was loath to give them up. I went with her to the house one April evening after dinner for what the doctor said, sighing, she hoped would be her last call there before she left. It was like July in that upper courtyard where the beds were spread for the night under the stars. As we climbed the stairs we saw Akhbar lying on a lacquered cot, his head in Rashid's lap, with one foot gathering the little jasmine flowers scattered over the sheet into a little wriggling pile over the toes of his other foot, and chewing away imperially at the end of an immensely long cucumber. At the sight of the

doctor he thrust his beloved vegetable hastily and futilely behind him, sat up erect, and salamed most politely. Rashid got up and, pushing the beds closer together made room for the chairs she called for. Bilkis had her baby asleep in her lap so she sat still. The Rani slowly pulled herself into a sitting position though the doctor protested, and Nur came and gave me an unusually cordial hug. The doctor was attending to Akhbar, for he had been having fever, and the three women listened eagerly to all she said about him. When she had finished with the boy, she attended to the Rani. And then finally she asked about Nur.

I had been sitting watching the girl. Now they all turned to look at her with tender consideration. It seemed pitiful to me, the great delight her condition was giving them. The Rani worshiped her unashamed. Rashid sighed out infinitely great congratulations from her lonely heart. Bilkis, studying her beautiful daughter, lifted her eyes and looked at her sister-in-law, and thanked God fervently. Nur herself seemed to me unusually gentle and patient. Her Hope had intensified her personality. She seemed more bird-like than ever, perched on the bed the doctor sat on, listening to wisdom with her head cocked to one side. The women were all, in that privacy, practically ready for bed. Nur had an old thin white veil tied about her gratifying waist, a very thin white silk shirt opened carelessly down the front, and a white net veil hanging over the back of her head. Even the

Rani had let her veils fall away carelessly. Rashid was frankly bareheaded, Bilkis happened to have a wisp of soft purple veiling hanging about the shoulder against which her baby lay. The mauve twilight within those old pink walls twinkled and faded into purple darkness and the stars came nearer and nearer till they seemed like little silver lanterns hung just above the fourth story of the tower. In that intimate dusk we seemed very near to one another, somehow, because of their concern for Nur, or because of their sorrow at the doctor's departure. They clicked their tongues when they thought of that, bewailing their fate. Why had the Most High arranged things so that the doctor was to be away just when Nur was to need her!

The doctor said emphatically that Mrs. Rallia Ram was quite capable of looking after Nur. Quite true, they said, but she was black, a native, an Indian, was Mrs. Rallia Ram. Could the doctor deny that? She could not. But in the city of Nur's home there were white lady doctors. Nur could be confined there. But no. Nur, who never did anything according to custom if she could help it, was not going to have her baby born in the house of its father's family. She was coming home to her mother, she asserted. And she asked the doctor very sensible questions, I thought, which the doctor answered comfortably, for Nur was well and strong enough, and normal. And besides, as the doctor remarked, she was nineteen, which in her opinion was a very good age to have a baby.

When we rose to go the doctor remarked that she would see them all again before she left. They would, of course, be at the *purdah* party. At that their faces fell. They looked at one another. They weren't coming to the party, the Rani said.

Not coming to the party? Why, we had understood that they had accepted our invitation! Everybody was coming to our party. The first *memsahib* was to be there, the wife of the district commissioner.

The Rani shrugged. Rashid sighed. Bilkis smiled bitterly, making a little face. Nur alone was genial and happy. She just grinned.

The Raja had decided, the Rani informed us, that they were not to go because ——

"It's this way, Doctor Sahib," interrupted Nur. "My brother is—he has a grievance. Yes. He has been dishonored. His face has been blackened. You know the Lieutenant Governor's visit last week? Well, somebody blundered, some low-caste committeeman or other, so that that man—what is it he calls himself?—Subhadar Mohammed Rasul, or some such name—he took precedence over my brother. And of course that was too insulting, for that man's grandfather was our grandfather's camel-herd! The merest foul sort of government official upstart! And that settles it—the brother says. It's time people realized who he is, he says. None of the women of *this* house are going about the streets of the town, associating with the"—the other women made polite effort to hush her up, here, but she grinned at them and went wickedly on—"with the

riffraff that attends parties at the mission house! 'Let the English-made gentry send their women through the bazaars,' he said. *'I'm* a respectable man. *I'm* not a camel-herd!' he said." Nur was imitating her brother's voice. It was naughty of her, but the women laughed, humoring her.

"I wanted, myself, to go," the Rani began, "to do you honor, now that I have recovered. You understand that it is not because we do not appreciate you, that we are not coming. We should have liked it, ourselves. Only our customs are otherwise."

"I understand," said the doctor, slowly. "Still, I do wish ——" She looked at Bilkis and Rashid, who were really disappointed. "I don't know any other family who isn't allowing their women to come. I should think, just for this once ——"

"Oh, well, what's the difference?" Bilkis was resigned to her lot. "I haven't got any decent clothes to wear, anyway. I don't care!"

She was still arrayed like Solomon in his glory. The other three women protested, jeering at her. She had a whole trunkful of suitable new garments, they declared.

"I have a notion to ask the Raja myself to let you come." The doctor spoke thoughtfully Just then, for some reason, she turned around, and saw in the dusk her little patient, Akhbar, sitting in a servant's lap, on the floor, directly behind where she had been sitting, smoking the family water-pipe. We hadn't

seen him creeping out of Rashid's arms after taking his dose of quinine. The doctor said, abruptly:

"Akhbar, stop that! You aren't to smoke when you have fever." She turned to the Rani, and considering the number of times she had said the same thing before, she spoke with great patience.

"Really, you mustn't let him do that! Not when he is ill!"

The Rani answered, irritably.

"Oh, Doctor, let him alone! He's only a baby! Let him enjoy himself while he can, the poor little fellow!"

But Nur, who had read books of hygiene in a school, was chagrined and annoyed. "I'll see that he stops it, Doctor Sahib! You naughty little unmannerly imp! You're not going to smoke all day and all night, too—not while *I'm* in this house! An old pipe like that, strong enough to kill a baby! That's why native children all fail in exams! My book says so!" She made gestures of cuffing the child, and commanded the servant to take the pipe downstairs.

"Oh, shut up! Stop your babbling!" cried the Rani, peevishly. "I suppose you know better than I do how to bring up a child, now that you've been to school! I suppose ——"

"By the grace of God I know enough not to let a sick baby smoke a pipe that has ——"

We both intervened. I said the equivalent of tut-tut! to Nur, and told her a more placid voice would be better for her baby. The doctor said to the

Rani that really the child would be stronger if they could prevent him smoking. And she said, too, that she still hoped that in some way they would get permission to come to the party. So we started down the stairs. Nur followed us to the outer door of the lower courtyard, and stood scarcely within the curtain of it, grumbling to us.

She said she *had* been careful not to annoy her mother. She said she had considered only her mother for a fortnight, watching every word that came out of her mouth. She was fed up with the house, she said, and she thought every day of going back to her own house. It was like living at the bottom of the well, to stay shut up in that house, only going out now and then to the hospital. "I'm coming to your party! We are all coming! I'm going to bring my mother! She had set her heart on going. He is a scoundrel, a very—bully, my brother. And if he says much more about this party, I'm going to it in a *sari!* You see if I don't!"

"I won't receive you in a *sari!* Don't you mention it to your mother!" the doctor cried.

And she chuckled as we went down the street, trying to imagine the Rani's face at the sight of her daughter arrayed in such infidel raiment In our town no Moslem woman had ever worn such a barefaced and shameless costume, except a courtesan who married a rich and pompous half-anglicized Hindu. We wondered if Nur indeed had worn it in her home or whether she was trying to shock us when she said that she did.

"But imagine the impertinence of that man!" sputtered the doctor. "After all the times I have gone to that house! The times I have lost a night's sleep for that family! After Ethel's wedding, too!" The thought of that made her speechless with indignation. We certainly hadn't opportunities of going to the weddings of our own people often. And when, the year before, the doctor had gone to the wedding of a dear friend of hers, she had got such a frantic sheaf of telegrams telling of Akhbar's imminent death that she had scarcely waited for the ceremony to be over to take the train home to save him. She had missed all the gayety and the fun only to find the child had eaten a large part of a bunch of green bananas. She sniffed, I thought rightly, as she recalled that. "I have a good deal of sympathy with Nur, really," she said. "I wouldn't like to live in the house with a brother like that." I wonder if I ought to ask him, myself, to let them come? It goes against the grain to ask even a little favor of that man."

As a matter of fact, she forgot all about asking the Raja. Though his family affairs occupy so much of this story, they occupied very little of our thought, really, for they were but one of many such families.

We were in our own compound within two minutes of the time the doctor expressed her annoyance at the Raja's refusal, and there we found three men and a woman who had brought us a patient, a poor woman who had gone quite raving mad in puerperal fever. The family could do nothing with her. She was violent, and she would run out into the street, shouting and threatening to kill people. There was no place where she could be restrained. They couldn't stand handing her over, a respectable veiled woman, to the police. They brought her to us.

There was no room in the hospital for such a patient. Its staff, too, was already overworked. So the doctor took her into our bungalow and into her bedroom. And when she had unbound her —they had tied her rather cruelly in self-defense— and anointed and soothed her, she had a bed brought for her. Then she proceeded to lock herself in with the woman. The seven pairs of doors she locked on the inside, one by one, while I protested in vain. I begged her to leave one door by which I might enter with the watchman in case she needed help. She refused. She said I was silly. So on my bed outside her door on the veranda I lay that night, listening for sounds of some grisly struggle within. I wasn't thinking of the Raja's house then. I was remembering resentfully the times the doctor had been rescued, from floods that had all but sucked her down, from mobs that were about to tear her limb from limb. And every time she had not only failed to thank her rescuers but she had scolded them

soundly for interfering—not because she was an ungrateful person, but simply because she couldn't realize danger. For her it didn't exist.

She kept that woman in our house for four days, until she had made arrangements for her permanent care. It was to me a tremendous relief to be rid of her. The doctor had probably slept as much in that room with her as she would have slept alone on the veranda, for she suffered pitifully that season from insomnia. But I had not slept as well, and the first night we were free of her we went to our peaceful beds on the unroofed veranda eagerly. It was so hot that night in the starlight up there, that when I threw some water from my drinking-cup onto the bricks of the floor, the wetness disappeared before I had put the cup down, as water disappears from the top of a hot stove. The doctor was taking something to make her sleep. So I said to her that I had forgotten to tell the watchman to turn the irrigating water onto the fig trees, and with that excuse I departed to tell him to watch the front gate and to refuse to let anyone in, whatever his errand might be, to disturb the doctor. It was my opinion that no one in the city could be needing help more than the doctor needed rest. And then I went back to my bed and went to sleep.

I woke up. The front gate was clicking. There was noise, sharp voices. I sat up quickly. I looked at the doctor. She was asleep, thank God! I realized the watchman was expostulating with some one who wouldn't be quiet, who wasn't going to be

refused, who was coming into the compound, toward the house.

I was as quiet as I could be. Jumping up hastily I gathered my kimono about me and crept toward the disturbance at the front of the house, trying to call to them in whispers to keep still. But it was too late. Turning, I saw that the doctor had been wakened. She was reaching about dazedly for her dressing-gown.

"What's her temperature?" she was asking, confusedly.

Then the man who by this time had got to the driveway near the front veranda, saw me, and, thinking it was the doctor, called to me with desperation in his rush of words:

"Preserver of the poor! It is I! It is Salim Khan! Raja Salim Khan! My son is dying! Akhbar is dying! I sent for you! I told you! You misunderstand me! Ask what you will, but come to save him! Don't be angry with me! I sent my servant this afternoon. You were operating! I sent another. You were resting! I came this evening. They said you had gone ministering into the city. I left a message for you, but you paid no heed! He is *your* child, and he is dying! My household shall come for as long as you like. Have I power to withstand you?"

I was saying, sternly, "*shh-ssh!*" But it did no good. The doctor had joined me. When the Raja cried that the child was having convulsions, she asked, languidly, "Is he, honestly?" She had made

a less professional but more human and virile remark as she had come up to where I was, but not one that demands recording here.

"Yes, he is!" the father pleaded. "His eyes are turned upward. Oh, don't delay! Preserver of the poor, I entreat you to hurry!"

The doctor by this time was far too much awake. She asked shortly:

"What's the little wretch eaten now!"

"Miss Sahib, it was a catastrophe! It was a calamity! The women are such fools! He has been having dysentery this last week and yesterday I returned from Delhi with a large tin of those foreign sweets which my mother had ordered me to bring for her to give you. The child got the tin and ate them all—*all* and those silver papers surrounding them which are not meant for the stomach. You misunderstand me. Don't be angry with me. The women are all to come to your party! I never presumed to think they should disobey your summons!"

The doctor went into her room to dress and go with him. I acknowledged reluctantly to myself that perhaps it was as well that she did. For in any case, being so entirely awake, she could not have got to sleep again. She would have gone in to her packing, or to her account books. I looked at the eucalyptus tree in the neighboring garden and knew from the position of the scorpion above it that it was after two. I went to sleep again and didn't hear the doctor come in. I asked her at early tea on the

veranda what was wrong with Akhbar. But she shrugged.

"Nothing much," she said, and refrained from complaint.

I looked at her, and my spirits sank. For the first time I saw her hand trembling, her beautiful sure hand that moved normally with such skillful precision. She had, however, only one more week to live through, and then she would be away.

And the fifth day of that week came the *purdah* party. There was, of course, no afternoon sleep for us that day. Our guests were invited for four, but most of them had no clocks and the calls to prayer were timed but vaguely, so they began to arrive, as I had foreseen, soon after two. The out-of-door room was ready for them. Part of the garden, a space the size perhaps of two tennis courts, had been screened securely about by *kanats* lent for the occasion by government officials. It was practically all in the shade of the great cathedral trees along the road. Their branches hung down gracefully over a part of it, not closely nor stuffily, but very high above us, up there where very little breezes now and then stirred a leaf or two. Our old watchman, whose eyes sanctimoniously looked the other way whenever a veiled being drew near, was stationed outside the gate to warn away the curious. And if by chance a man on an errand had gained admittance to the compound, he would have hesitated to approach the door in the screen. And if he had approached that door he couldn't have seen inside, for I had

arranged a demure curtain across it so that our guests could feel as secure with us as they did inside the inner curtains of their homes.

They came in ghost-like chattering groups, baby-laden, babies tucked away inside their long white capes, with little heads peering out at the world, babies riding astride the hips of unveiled servants. The Moslem ladies were swathed from head to foot in yards and yards of dowry cambric, gathered into long capes designed to prevent the wearer's identification in the streets. Before their eyes they had little medallions of lace, so that they might see vaguely where they were going. The Hindu ladies were not so securely, so indistinguishably covered. Little wisps of their clouds of glory trailed below their veils behind them along the embroidered hems of the very full skirts that billowed about their bare heels. But all of them, whatever their religion, once inside our liberating shelter, threw aside the disguises that protected them, so that their magnificence might shine forth. And then was fulfilled before me the doggerel that had haunted me from the days of my nonsensical girlhood:

> The sultana has trousers of taffeta
> Having purchased ten yards and a half at a
> Bargain, and now
> See the courtiers kowtow!
> Not a one of them dares to laugh at her.

There may be some significance in the fact that the wisdom with which my patient instructors endeavored in those years to enrich me has been, alas!

mostly forgotten. The instructors themselves are seldom recalled. The places of their labor I can scarcely visualize when I try. But that absurd limerick, its place on the page and the hour I read the paper containing it, the room where I sat and the others in that room, all that comes back habitually and vividly, and it may be that its recurrence has predisposed me to exotic friends. As I looked that day round about me on the assembling *purdah* party, I chuckled and I gloated over so rich a fulfilling. The guests, to be sure, were not sultanas. Their garments were not literally trousers. They had none of them ever in their lives bought a bargain. There were no courtiers about to spy upon them, and no one was inclined to laugh. But, oh, the intoxicating glory of their colors!

It is known, you understand, that Alexander camped somewhere along the river bank near the hospital site, and it is supposed by some—by the doctor and me, to be exact—that Alexander himself slept on our tennis court. No one can deny that the women of our city, peeking out from their safety after his rearguard, if they saw any shade or tint in his kingly array which they had not mastered, set about acquiring it before the dust of the invader's heels had settled down to its peace. In the privacy of their homes mistresses and servants and the daughters of the family had gone on, generation after generation, playing away at the art of dyeing, and in the bazaars through all the centuries, dynasty after dynasty, invasion after invasion, the castes

of dyers had continued waiting upon God for hints of new possibilities. The best of all they had achieved had been unfolded out of precious boxes that day to adorn the doctor's party. It had been ferreted out from obscure corners of the bazaar. It had been commanded from surrounding cities. No sensible woman, naturally, had let such an occasion for new garments pass unused. So there flowed and flapped and wrinkled and twinkled before our dazzled eyes colors that have no English names because they have no occidental existence—the purple of distant Himalayan foothills when they are green with spring foliage; the bronze-colored greens of Kashmiri dawns; the rose-red orange color of desert sunsets; the memories of Moghul rubies in moonlight; rainy twilight in Persian gardens; mists clearing away from snow-topped mountains after storms; phosphorescence on starry tropical seas. It occurred to me that afternoon that it is perhaps partly because English windows are curtained so largely with one color of fierce blue that Indians returning to their homes declare England a barbarous nation.

There in front of me was the wife of the inspector of schools; a rainbow achievement she was, too, but fat. And I thought, looking at her, that though her race had fathomed color, it had not accomplished corsets. And corsets, I said, are woman's true and essential screen, the covering of her disproportionate and otiose protrudence, the one thing which in the West preserves the myth of some divinity in her form. And perhaps, I thought, our civi-

lization's sober fruit, corsets and soap, our less picturesque conventions of propriety, are more sane than this opiate beauty of hue. My little plain white frock had been washed many times. Excepting her shirt, not one of the garments of the inspector's wife had been washed, or could have been washed, and being hers, it was right that they should not have been washed. (She was like Queen Elizabeth in that.) Her veil was a kind of net-like chiffon, the faint bluish mauve of bare guava trees late in winter afternoons; her changeable taffeta trousers were the green terra-cotta of new mango leaves in the monsoon, her kimono-like shirt was a rosy pearl pink, exactly like the inside of Indian grapefruit. Her sister had a veil of sheer white hand-woven stuff like linen lawn, with a border a foot wide of emerald green and real gold, gathered loosely about her chin so that the almond color of her shirt appeared beneath it. And mark you how that woman's trousers fit!—how one wrinkle of fulness above another climbs up, as it were in spirals from the inside of the ankle, where it fits snugly, outward in lines of perfect grace toward the hips, with just the right deftness about the knees. Chic, we think that, the apparent artlessness of art. I knew that no western woman ever stood fussing with her tailor about the fitting of her coat collar longer than that woman toiled over those trousers. I realized how many times she must have sent her servants and her husband and her brothers and her sons back and forth between her dwelling and the

bazaar before they discovered shoes with that jade-green silk stitching on dull gold.

She stood where each flock of guests unveiling would be struck with her elegance. They arrived grave and defensively on their dignity, because for an affair of this sort they had no tradition to rely upon. Neither Hindu sages nor Moslem prophets had left them instructions about meeting socially, as their equals, more or less low-born hospital assistants who in certain vital matters of intelligence were so far their superiors, upon whom, now that the doctor was departing, they were to be more than ever dependent. They were not really ill at ease, for at least half of us there that day, perhaps three-fourths of us, were conscious, fortunately, of our entire superiority to all the rest, a fact which gave us a certain graciousness to one another.

Taj came humbly in with her humble sister-in-law. She was shabbily dressed, her face was old and flabby, and her expression suggested mourning rather than rejoicing. But even she had a certain basis of reassurance, for was she not leading by the hand Theodore-Indeed, the doctor's claim to immortality? And there were arriving the ladies of the Divan Sahib's house, in whose minds no misgivings about position had ever arisen. Their trousers were hidden almost entirely by the lovely ceremonial skirts of taffeta which protect Hindus from defilement by the casteless. The young daughter-in-law of that house was wearing three veils of various degrees of pink one above the other; her skirt was sage green, tied

with a girdle of amethyst; and she had a band of smooth, cunningly-wrought gold across her forehead below her shining black hair, a new style of which we all made note hastily. In spite of the baby son she carried across her hips, in spite of the weight of gold on her arms, she moved, in her billowing skirt, like a lovely wave. If she had not been so arrogant, she would have been the most beautiful woman of them all. But all the Divan's ladies were arrogant.

They seemed to be sneering even at the guest of honor, the D. C.'s wife. She sailed zestfully in at the appointed time in full garden-party array—a white frock and a great rose-pink hat, and certainly a great deal more jewelry than she would have worn if I hadn't given her a hint. She was extremely blond and she must once have had a high color. Though the heat had long ago toned that down, she was still a fine-looking woman, and a very charming one, and with the exception of a keen young wife who had been ordered to the hills early, she was the only one of the dozen Englishwomen in the station who ever gave a thought to Indian women. Every eye was upon her as she entered. The women were stock still with curiosity for a moment. Then they began earnestly talking. I knew what they were saying to one another. Look at that chain! She wears bracelets! The doctor doesn't wear bracelets! Ah, but the doctor is a woman of God, and this one is of the world, with a husband to please! What sort of silk is that of her skirt? Not stiff, at

all. It seems cheap. She has four rings on. The Miss Sahib has no hat so deliriously beautiful as that one. Her hair is like a fairy of paradise! The doctor's shoes are more expensive, though. They are not! But I should think the doctor probably has more skirts and trousers on underneath than the First Lady. Her earrings! Probably real pearl, I should think. But no setting, to speak of. Still, they aren't bad. She can't speak Panjabi? No, but she is very blond, just the same. Where are her babies? Oh, ladies like her don't bother with babies! They give them away at once to some hired servant! Some low-caste creature nurses them.

The lady was still standing near the door with the doctor when the Raja's family entered—very late, too, they considered themselves regretfully. Nur, of course, was first of them to uncover herself. One impatient gesture effected her revealing. She stood forth, and across the garden I saw her distant cousins nudging one another. I fancied I heard a murmur of envious disapproval. She was dressed in utterly shining clean white fine cambric, all washed and washable, schoolgirl like, western, but her trousers were very full indeed and tied with a long carmine-colored silk cord. She alone of all our guests wore stockings—white silk stockings—and her shoes were very high-heeled patent-leather *mules*. Her sea-green veil was so sheer, so fine, so startling, that only a great courtesan or a very queen would have worn it with such clothes; and—it was perfectly scandalous!—she wore no jewelry at all!—

not one bit of gold! But—what is this?—at her ears she has little snug-fitting pearl earrings!—and look!—so has the First Lady!—Nur has earrings exactly like the First Lady's! Certainly that was a gasp our party gave under its breath. For we weren't going to acknowledge that this chit of a childless girl had impressed us. She stood for a second looking about her condescendingly, as if to say: "All this jewelry! How truly quaint the old fashions are! I threw all mine away long ago!"

Then she took her precious niece from the servant who carried her, adjusted her infant veil, and went to where the doctor stood with the First Lady.

"Salaam to the ladies respectfully!" she said to the child.

"Ah, what a darling!" exclaimed the First Lady.

She was perfectly sincere, and no wonder, for Fatma that day was a perfect living gurgling doll of a child. The women had obviously played at dressing her for the party as little girls play with a doll. She had fine new trousers of taffeta. Those minute garments of praise, those tiny glad-rags, were of cherry-colored stiff silk, perhaps nine inches long, with narrow gold binding about the fat baby ankles. She had a little sage-green silk shirt all embroidered with tiny flowers, and her first veil was rosy pink and of small gold spangles. She was just trying to get it away from her head, to Nur's great amusement, when the doctor reached out and took her in her arms.

She introduced her to the First Lady, and she conversationally grabbed for the Lady's gold chain.

"Is she yours?" the Lady asked Nur.

And there was Bilkis to be presented, the very Queen of Sheba, looking her very best, all beaming and dimpling to see her beloved child so admired. At that moment I saw how beautiful she might have been if she had been happy. Of course she was arrayed like the sun—there was no possible bit of smart and swanky jewelry which didn't adorn her. She stood there blushing, with her white cape not removed, but only thrown back from her face so that it made a frame about it and hung gracefully down to her feet, revealing her greens and blues and saffrons and mauves. Excitement had taken all the bitterness away from her face and she looked from under her downcast lashes at the First Lady shyly, ineffably proud of her baby. And the Rani was there, to be given her due honor, the Rani, too, excited out of her habitual self. She had her long outer cape even more securely gathered about her. In fact, she was but peeking out of it, holding Akhbar by the hand. She looked more like a round-eyed child at a Christmas party than a tyrannical mother-in-law. She looked absolutely gentle and sweet. And Rashid, also, who carried Shafi, belied her life that day by appearing commonplace.

After the guests had looked one another over sufficiently, the party languished momentarily. It happened that I noticed then that the First Lady, surrounded by a cluster of women, was carrying on a

conversation with them with the help of a nurse for an interpreter, who knew a little English. I joined them.

"What these women want to know," said the nurse to me in Panjabi, "is this, and I don't know whether it is proper to ask her or not. They want to know if she nursed her babies herself."

I explained to her that all the women were convinced that white mothers never nurse their babies.

"Certainly I nursed my babies!" she said, warmly. "You tell them I nursed my babies. That is—three of them I nursed. I couldn't nurse the fourth." Suddenly—perhaps the heat had unnerved her—tears came brimming to her eyes. "I lost that little boy."

Instantly she rallied. She recovered her bearing at once. But the women had seen. They had understood it before I translated. With those little tears which annoyed the weeper, she had become one of them. The racial gulf had closed. More women were gathering about us. She nursed herself three babies, they were saying to one another, and the fourth time she was ill. Ah, the poor thing! Her baby died. I was asking her if she wouldn't make them a little speech about her children. She protested at first, but I said I would manage the language. Families are what interest them, I said, seeing how unimportant I had become, how insignificant even the doctor had become, compared with this fruitful woman. All of a sudden, before we knew how it had come about, all the women were gathered

in an audience before us, sitting on the mats, forgetful of rank and position, waiting to hear about the little white children. She was a thoroughly good sport, that Englishwoman, and she answered their questions without hesitation or condescension. What they wanted first to know was why she hadn't brought her three with her.

She told them first about her oldest son. He was thirteen years old now, and his name was Gilbert—what does that mean, they demanded, trying to say the strange word among themselves. It was a name of his fathers, I said to them, and he was at home in England, in a school, and she hadn't seen him for eighteen months—the sighs of commiseration which greeted this statement might well have wrung tears from a lonely mother, I thought, but she was on her guard. And was he a beautiful baby like yourself, they wanted to know. And she said enthusiastically, oh yes, he was just a pet of a baby, such a nice strong child, and he had four teeth when he was six months old. And they sighed their surprise and appreciation of such a child. Four teeth at six months! I told her that her husband's prestige was rising moment by moment. And to them I said he had been such a fine strong baby because she had been fully grown when he was born. And she didn't mind telling them that she had been twenty-two at the time. They marvelled, and asked if that was her first marriage, and they agreed that it was a good custom—marriage in old age—if you could arrange it safely. And was it in this town that the clever child had

been born? Her mother's house? Where was her mother's house? How was that lady now? How was her husband? Had she other children? The lady had a sister in India, had she? Married? Her sister by her own father and mother, an entire sister? That was good! The sister was taking care of the lady's little girls now for her, was she? And then the Lady was going to the hills and take care of her sister's children there, was she, so that the sister could come down to her husband, in turn? Where was her husband, and how many children? When was the Lady going to bring her little children down here? When it grew less hot, after the rains? For the children of such fairy-like women are fragile, they explained to one another, and they die in the heat as roses wilt. And then they discovered that the Lady's little girls were going home to England in the spring. Ah, surely not! How could she live, letting her six-year-old child go so far away? They moaned and they groaned, and they sighed, "Alas!" These women have hearts of iron—yet tender. Tears had come to her eyes, thinking of that baby. And had she pain at their birth, they asked her, as they had pain? And she said yes, she had had pain, but she had been well cared for, and she told them about her doctor, and congratulated them on their doctor. And I was thinking again, Oh, if men, the silly creatures, would only stop talking politics and budgets and government, and let their little children draw them together!

And was her husband good to her, they wanted me to ask. I knew her well enough not to be afraid of that question, and she answered quickly, like a loyal wife, that he was very good to her indeed, just a dear, he was.

And when I put that into Panjabi—suddenly in our keen happy attention to the beautiful Lady—there was a sob, a great long shaking sob among us. Naturally the Lady, too, looked around for its source—and there was Taj! She had been sitting humbly on the ground behind Mrs. Rallia Ram. When the First Lady saw her, so colorlessly dressed among the gay guests, tears running down the face she was attempting to hide behind a nice-looking little boy hugged close to her, she turned to ask me what was wrong.

I hesitated to tell her. But after all ——

"Her husband is taking another wife."

"Another—what?" echoed the Lady.

"Another wife."

"Ah ——" she said, slowly understanding. "Ah, the wretch!"

Our guests were lifting their eyebrows at one another significantly. You see! She doesn't like it, either, they were saying. They were looking at Taj commiseratingly. And they were looking quite openly and hostilely at another woman, in a more prominent place, a bold and a vulgar and an overdressed woman. Suddenly it dawned upon me—that was the new wife of Taj's husband!

I hadn't been able to identify her in my mind

before, though Taj had assured me that I must know her. I thought it best to change the course of the conversation, so I called Theodore-Indeed to us, and told the First Lady the story of his birth. And Taj drew near, too. She came crouching at my feet, pulling my skirt covertly, and imploring me to ask the Lady to prevent the second wife ever having possession of the little lad. Of course no one could prevent that. As soon as the child became seven, his father could take him altogether away from his mother. So I tried to quiet her with little pats as I went on talking. And I was conscious that the women, though in most cases they would have said, shrugging, that this second marriage was simply the new wife's fate, a thing for which she was not responsible, rallied now about Taj sympathetically, casting black and resentful glances at her co-wife.

That was, of course, quite natural. Taj had been interesting to them because of the birth of the child. And now—well, the moment I identified the new wife, I believed all the unkind things that had been said about her. She was a woman whose face can be accurately described. She belonged to an intermarried caste of middle-class Moslems living side by side in a certain street, whose faces would have suggested the theory of a Greek invasion if there had been no historical account of one. They averred that their ancestors were all Kashmiri, and perhaps some of them were. But this woman who had caused Taj to grow thin and flabby had a face entirely classic, and terribly so. She had a low broad

forehead, thick, finely drawn straight black eyebrows, rather protuberant and almost meeting, a straight nose not flattened but nearly perpendicular, and a mouth such as gods and goddesses appear always to have had, which time fortunately seems to have eliminated from the human face, with loose lips above and below like fat curling snakes. There was a certain beauty about her, a clearness of yellow skin and an undeniable grace. She was not scrawny, as Taj had declared; she was slender and lithe. But she looked as if she would take pleasure in making children cry. She looked base and she looked cruel, and I understood with an impulse of vindictive pleasure why the women said that Fazl Alahi would get what they thought he deserved from that marriage.

The First Lady was asking me in an undertone, thoroughly startled, if there really was much polygamy nowadays, and Nur was repeating under her breath, so that she wouldn't forget it, the Lady's disapproval. "*Redge!*" she was saying, with great relish, "*redge!*" and Taj was begging me to listen to her prayer, and the women were asking eagerly what the First Lady thought about second marriages, and I was thinking that perhaps with so many second wives present we would do better to discuss something else, and Mrs. Rallia Ram—who ought to have been still in bed—was telling them emphatically that certainly white women hated the idea of polygamous wives, when through the door in front of me I saw a strange creature entering. The women

sitting facing me had their backs to the door, but they turned, all of them, suddenly, to look. And certainly it was a curious sight—a tall woman veiled to her feet with a new white cape—a woman who, hesitating, sat down awkwardly in a wicker chair near the door, with no attempt to join us. A nurse, smiling from ear to ear, gave me the equivalent of a wink, and went and took the person by the hand and began unveiling her.

There was a murmur—a gasp—an upstarting of delight. *Ai!* God Most High! Look! It is the doctor! It is our doctor in Indian clothes! We had no longer any audience before us. Our flock had flown across the garden. Oh, God of Truth, look at her! Such garments! *Ai*, beautiful she is!

It was the Panjabi costume which the hospital staff had had made for her in spite of her repeated warnings that she would not accept gifts. Let us give her just a cheap affair, the nurses had pleaded with me, not of gold, not of silk. And our guests were being told that it was as much as the nurses had dared to offer. They were crowding about to feel the cotton material of which the trousers were made. Most artistically chosen it was, too, they were explaining to one another—salmon-pink sateen with mauve stripes an inch wide and four inches apart. It had a mauve silky tie-string which they examined. They discovered that the doctor had retained her foreign veil beneath it, her corset, and of course the trousers couldn't sit quite well with such a foundation. The shirt was of mere white cotton, a garment

one of the nurses had made by hand. She had two veils, one of net elaborately done by hand—several assistants had worked on it to get it done—and a really lovely pink one spangled with gold scales, which an intimate Hindu friend had given her, weeping because her widowed young daughter was not again to wear such finery. All she needed now was some jewelry. They began all undoing their earrings, their necklaces; there was a rain of ornaments, in spite of her protesting. They would get confused—they wouldn't be able to tell which were which. So half a dozen guests offered all their jewelry as the doctor's sole ornament.

Nur's old great-aunt then took command of the situation and brushing the others aside, began adorning the doctor with her own earrings. The doctor stood it well. I had often made such a fool of myself for the nurses and the hospital patients. But never before had she played about for their amusement. They stood alit with laughter, six deep about her, the First Lady and myself on the outskirts of the crowd. Moment by moment she grew more satisfactory. If only they had some hair oil, the old aunt said. Couldn't some one get some hair oil? A veil couldn't be made really smart with loose, untidy hair. But the doctor rebelled. It was contrary to her custom, she declared, and they gave up the idea at once. They weren't going to violate any of her religious scruples. All she needs now, they said, is a baby across her hip. And the babies are all hers.

Give her the first one that comes to hand. Ah, God, how right it all is now!

Watching them from our distance, I smiled, understanding their comments. Near me stood two old quiet Hindu women. One sighed from the bottom of her soul sadly. "Alas!" she said. "To think how plain she looks in the hospital, in those foreign white garments! And to look at her now!"

There were few present, who, like the Rani, had never been inside the hospital, but there were many who had not been inside our house. We showed them over it. They followed us about from one gaunt high room to another, with ejaculations and marvelings. A very palace our home was, they said, a dwelling for fairies, with the space of kingdoms in it. Why had we separate bedrooms? We slept side by side out-of-doors in the heat, but in the cold season we slept each of us in our own room because it was our custom, did we? We just shut the door —how many times did we lock it?—and blew out the light, and got into bed and went to sleep alone in a room, did we?

God! what courage!

And at meal time we sat in state in a room which had no other purpose, did we, like queens, at the table spread with the dazzling white cloth—it was an old, worn, badly ironed cotton rag, really—and feasted while servants stood behind us and fanned us bite by bite. With all these tools of silver we crowded food into our mouths, did we? The table was by this time spread for dinner. What sort of

spoons would these be, they asked, handling them curiously. They were what are called forks, we explained. And with this, the mystery of our wardrobe became overwhelming. Why, oh, why was it, really, that, being so rich, we went about so plainly dressed? Why—we adjure you to tell us the truth! —do you not wear earrings and bracelets?

So we sighed and said it was our custom and our fate, and let it go at that. Explanations, I felt, were too complicated. For each one of the Hindus who paused for my answer, and some of the Moslems, were wearing bracelets worth more than my year's salary. And yet I reckoned that the soap that was used daily in the mission house probably cost as much as a day's food for some of them.

X

The party came to an end. The appointed hours had passed too soon away. In the garden the First Lady was taking her departure. It was the very nicest *purdah* party she had ever attended, she said, and I thought she spoke sincerely. She wondered if she couldn't have such a one herself the next year. She envied us our knowledge of the language. She was just going.

But Nur-ul-Nissa was detaining her. She said to me that she wanted greatly to ask her one question

before she went—an English question. "Is this the way you say it?" she whispered to me, articulating laboriously.

"She wants to ask one more question of you," I said. I saw the First Lady wondering, as she looked at Nur's condition, what obstetrical question remained unasked. But she was gracious, and Nur, drawing near to her, said:

"Can you drive a modor-car?"

No wonder the Lady's smile broadened. Nur stood there, a mixture of regal Indian swank and schoolgirl shyness, eagerly waiting for an answer.

"No, I'm afraid I don't. Do you?"

I don't think she could have appreciated how exactly right her answer was, implying a sort of inferiority. "No, I'm afraid I don't. Do you?" The girl looked as if she drove a car! It was an immortal answer, and Nur stood tasting the sweetness of it. She revelled in it. She cocked her head to one side, trying to think of the English reply. But it was of no use. The words didn't come.

Instantly she lifted her voluble and international hands, and spread them out, fingers downward, and said plainly in one gesture:

"When *this* is over, I shall learn to drive!"

The Lady understood and laughed a happy little laugh, and said:

"You must be careful!"

"In the future!" cried Nur suddenly remembering her English.

There it was, the impact of the West upon the

East. "This" for Nur, was something to be got over, to have done with. There was something else to look forward to. There were other things in the world besides children. There were those fascinating motor-cars. Afterward I thought about her question again and again, and wondered about its significance. Did it portend good or evil? Was it the end of defeat or the beginning of victory? She was learning from the West to defend herself against the ultimate sorrow of women. She believed that barrenness was not wholly a tragedy—and perhaps that conviction was itself the greater tragedy.

The Indian guests were loth to go. They lingered about, discussing the Lady. Whatever happens to India politically, whether British peace continues to prevail or whether she achieves her national right to chaotic independence, there will always be one fact to the credit of the English recorded in our zenana history. The Englishmen who ruled over us, our women will go on saying, were not entirely without qualification. There was a great sahib in our district once. His wife had a strong heart, as strong as iron but very tender, and all his lovely sons had many teeth when they were born.

The ladies from the Raja's house stayed longest of all. Naturally the Rani wasn't inclined to depart, when the occasion was unique in her life. The doctor told her she was too tired to stay longer, but she managed to resist her. She explained that they

had been so late in arriving because, in spite of all their preparations, there had been some mistake about the carriage coming for them. The doctor insisted that she must get back to the hospital, but they detained her. She said she must go in and change into her own clothes. They would wait till she came out, Nur replied. They had sent a servant home to get something, and they weren't going till she had got back and they had given the thing to the doctor.

I sat with them. It was getting to be dusk. The Rani kept calling Nur away from the screened door. But she replied that if she didn't keep watch the doctor might escape her and go on to the hospital, which I thought quite probable. So she continued vigilant, and fortunately the servant arrived just as the doctor was coming out of the house. Nur waylaid her and drew her in to where the Rani and I were sitting.

"Here is a present for you," she giggled, and held forth a pewter bowl. The doctor was about to protest that she wasn't going to take a present, when she saw ——

"What's this?" she asked.

"Those are those sweets of yours!" Nur was pirouetting about on one foot, in sheer joy.

"What sweets?"

"Those that Akhbar ate the other night!" She sniggered. She laughed aloud. They all laughed, in spite of themselves, and started with one voice explaining, Nur exultant, Bilkis admiring, Rashid

informative, the Rani deprecating, and the children trying to get the sweets.

"These are the sweets we ordered from Delhi to give you, because we knew you were displeased with us. At first he refused to go to you—Akhbar was so ill it was terrible. He even suggested getting a man from the men's hospital." "And Nur, here, to frighten him said—"As if we would allow that creature to give the child medicine"—"I did *not* say it!" —"His eyes were whirling into his head, the poor lamb!"—"I just saw he really had eaten two or three of them"—"Bilkis was crying with anxiety"—"I didn't say it! I only dumped the others out." "The father of Akhbar came in just then, and when he saw the empty tin he cried, 'My God! He has eaten them all!' And Nur screamed and said, '*Ai*, they are poisonous for children!' You *did* say it, Nur!—" "Well, it just came to my mind. I had to laugh!" "And he started to the door. 'God have mercy upon us!' he was saying. But you frightened *me*, too! I really believed they were poisonous!"— "Well, they are, really, for a sick child—a whole tin of them. I told you right away, mammie, as soon as he had gone!"—"You deserved a good beating for such a trick!"—"But you have liked the party, mother."

I alone thought of the doctor. The women could have no conception of her professional sacrifice. She stood with the bowl of stale chocolates in her hand looking from one to the other of them. She was going home. What was the use of words. Nur

stood dancing and gloating. "The *redge!*" she was saying. "The *redge!*"

"The carriage is here," said the servant.

"*Ai*, Allah!" said Nur. "Let's be going. I want to tell my brother about the camel-herd's wife. Did you notice, Bilkis, the way her trousers hung? No style, that creature! How could she know how to wear clothes, walking unveiled to the fields with the camel-herd's midday bread! She looked like a stick with a rag tied around it! I'll tell my brother that."

She stood for a moment there, blossoming, blooming, fruitful, as beautiful as the evening star above her—only one was shining, at that hour. And whatever else she looked like, she did not look like a stick with a rag tied around it.

THAT summer, at every mourning the women said, "If the doctor had been here, our beloved would not have died!" If any untoward event occurred, they shrugged and said, "What can you expect, with the doctor in a foreign land!" I must say that it seemed to me, too, that there were more unhappy things than usual that hot season.

If the doctor had not gone home, the *purdah* party would likely not have happened. In that

case, Taj would not have become obsessed with the idea of appealing to the First Lady for her intervention; the First Lady would not have spoken to her husband about his trustworthy clerk; the D. C. would not have taken Fazl Alahi to task about mistreating his wife; Fazl Alahi would not have explained, adequately, all dignified and grieved, about his grandfather's three sisters and the stern duty which he was manfully shouldering in marrying the widow; the D. C. would not have regretted his interference; and Fazl Alahi would not have resorted to rashness.

But as it was, he came away from that interview with his chief, went straight to his little old home where Taj was still living, and divorced her. That is, he told her she was divorced. He said it three times, and it was true. And then he put her out of that little house, locked the door, and, picking up the Very Gift of God, walked toward his new home, all proud and dignified, cajoling the lad, who looked back at his mother.

She stood bewildered, not knowing what to do. Then she saw her son looking back at her, and she began running after him, crying and shrieking hysterically, behaving scandalously, so that Fazl Alahi had to stop and curse her. In spite of his words, she followed the child almost to the door of the house. And then she turned down toward the hospital, crying and shrieking.

It was sunset. The gate was closed. She persuaded the watchman to let her in.

She began imploring me to come with her at once, with all the hospital servants well armed, to rescue her darling from the clutches of that second mother. I had to be very short with her. She said she had not literally a soul but me to go to, not a place in the city where she could sleep one night. This wasn't true, altogether. She had an old aunt, and she had a brother, a poor man with many children. She gave long and involved reasons why she couldn't go to him. What she intended doing, I saw, was to throw the burden of her helplessness upon some one like myself, who, she supposed, had influence with the government.

I was reluctant even to keep her for that one night. I had the hospital to consider. In theory that institution decidedly was not to be a refuge for every woman who quarreled with her husband. Certainly there was a great need in that city for a screened court of justice to which the veiled might resort in their extremities. But we had definitely decided not to be a court of domestic relationship. Besides, the hospital was full. It was not wise to have Indian women staying in our house. Hindus could scarcely do it without losing caste. Moslems could hardly do it without losing their reputations. For we were an unveiled and unscreened sort. Our servants were men, and went in and out as servants do in Anglo-Indian households. To be sure, they were men whom the first doctor had trained in their youth to their peculiar duties in a woman's household by means of that famous riding-whip of hers.

But still, conventions were conventions, and we were not in *purdah*.

However, Taj wept, clinging to my feet, until bedtime. It didn't matter in the least what became of her now, she wailed. She might as well be baptized. She suddenly realized she had been a Christian in her heart for years. She would stay with us and study medicine. She would take her place as a low-caste nurse. She would do cooking for the Moslem patients. She would be our outcast sweeper if thereby she might get possession of her child. She hadn't a penny in the world. She had no breakfast for the morrow, but that didn't matter, because she would certainly die if she had to sleep a night away from the child.

I asked her what was the use of her coming to me for help when she wouldn't do a thing I suggested. I reminded her that I had warned her not to go to the First Lady. I told her that if she would be patient, the child would be sure to come to her at our house as soon as his father went to his office in the morning. But he would be tied up, she howled. That woman, his second mother, would probably beat him till he died.

As a matter of fact, to satisfy an old friend in the hills who couldn't rest, she averred, if I continued sleeping alone on the roof of the house, I was having some nurse sleep there with me, and there was no reason why Taj might not have had that job, if only she would stop wailing. I let her sleep there with me that night. But she was

a nuisance. Even in my troubled sleep I heard her sobbing out arguments to me.

She rose before daylight, and all that summer dawn walked up and down the street where the child was. She hung about, begging people to go in, on some pretense, and tell him that she was waiting for him. In the middle of the morning she came back into the crowded clinic, hugging him tight to her. He had run away from his new mother as soon after his father left the house as he could. He was weeping and excited, and Taj looked him all over to find bruises. The fact that he was unharmed didn't seem to console her. In a few minutes the new wife arrived, breathless, noisy, demanding the child, shrieking out that she intended having him in spite of me.

By this time I was realizing bitterly that there were many things I did not know about the management of a hospital. The one thing about which I was certain was that the matrimonial troubles of Fazl Alahi were not going to add to the sordidness of our morning clinics. I wasn't very patient, in those days of frightful heat. But I knew I had to be careful how I proceeded. So I told the woman firmly and courteously that the matter could not be discussed during the hours of the clinic, nor in the hospital compound. She was to go quietly home at once, and when her husband came from the office she was to send him to me, to the bungalow, where he would find his wife and child. And as I said this I led her to the bougainvillæa gate, and after I had

inquired about her health and asked if she wanted any medicine, I started her down the street toward her home.

I thought over the matter vainly all that restless afternoon. I felt that I could do nothing but say shortly to Fazl Alahi that I intended seeing that Taj got what she was legally entitled to—custody of her son until he was seven. He wouldn't know how I shrank from the thought of appealing, myself, to his chief, the D. C. He couldn't imagine how impossible it was for me to take the case into court. I would tell him that I was considering giving Taj a job in the hospital, cooking for low-caste patients so that she might earn bread for his heir. I wondered if he would smile to think what a lazy servant I would find her.

I doubted the wisdom of such threatenings. They were apt to bring the hospital into disrepute with the heads of families. Everybody in the city would be discussing them. Men would be saying that that was the sort of thing that came from letting women go about to mission-house parties—they made the acquaintance of officials' wives and appealed to them over the heads of their masters.

And what would be the use of veils, of the whole system of *purdah* so carefully built up, if women by means of these hospital folk could appeal to the law for justice as if they were men? Some of them would forbid their women coming to us. And perhaps some of our former patients might die unattended; perhaps some of them might

have to suffer pain that we could have relieved; perhaps a few more babies would go blind for lack of those very simple measures which saved their sight—all this might happen because I had, in my white power, taken up the cause of one mother.

I didn't know how little I needed to worry. Fazl Alahi had many reasons, as I learned later, for wishing to placate me that afternoon. He was too conspicuously honest not to have alert detractors, whose hour, it seemed, had come at last. Had he, indeed, inherited this estate? Where were the other faint-hearted heirs? What about the dowry of that uncle's remarried daughter? What about the scandal of last year concerning his second wife? What about that scandal of the year before? What about the story, that great web of lies with which he had blinded the eyes of his chief, beginning to find him out? The hospital people were beginning to understand him, too, were they? They were taking his child away from him, were they? These were the questions, the rumors of questions, that were making Fazl Alahi look weary and harassed when he appeared that afternoon. And perhaps—thinking it over, this seems probable to me—he was already beginning to regret that his grandfather had had three sisters.

I had asked Mrs. Rallia Ram to be present at the interview, to satisfy our mongrel conventions. I had refused to let Taj appear. Fazl Alahi sat down wearily, declaring that I was his father and his mother. He was distressed beyond endurance,

he said, by the situation. He deplored it utterly. It had never occured to him that Taj would behave so badly. He couldn't help himself. He couldn't have a wife running crying about the streets, a man in his position, telling all sorts of stories about his establishment, trying to get him into trouble with the D. C. If she wouldn't control herself, she couldn't expect him to keep her as a wife. And now she was beginning to poison the mind of the child against him. He didn't know what he was going to do.

I couldn't refrain from reminding him that these things adjust themselves quite naturally among Indians. He sighed deeply, pained by my frivolity. I said he ought to take her back. He said he would not. I said she then might begin cooking in the hospital. He was very angry. I asked innocently what she was to eat. He said she could go to her brother and work there, that she could marry again. I sat and glared at him. He said she had behaved outrageously. I hinted that the D. C would doubtless see that she got justice. He said he would take the child home and think it over. Out of the window I saw a party of villagers come in through the gate, carrying a woman on a bed. I hadn't time to discuss it at greater length, I said. He must leave the child here with me, with Taj, till the morrow. He cried out that he couldn't positively leave the child with us for the night. I said tartly that the child had once stayed a month with us and was no worse for it. He apologized, and

groaned that he was harassed. And I thought of Taj, as I had seen her last, sitting on my bedroom floor, bending over the thin sleeping child, fanning him, with tears running down her cheeks. I said firmly that he must leave the child at least till the morrow, when he could come to me with his decision. He would leave them both with me a month if I could put some sense into her, he said.

That night on the roof I did my best with her. That she wasn't much the wiser was obvious. When I was ready to go to sleep she announced that she intended sitting up all the night to guard the child from his father. I exhorted her more earnestly than ever to be reasonable, and commanded her to lie down. She begged me then to allow her to put our three beds so close together that they touched. I refused. The child's bed might be put between the other two, but I refused to be wakened by his tossing about. There was no danger, I assured her, and if there should be, if for any reason anyone came to the roof, I would waken at once.

But nothing wakened me until the call to morning prayer was howled out from the mosque beyond the sugar-cane garden. I opened my eyes and saw that Taj was not on her bed. The child was still sleeping. I lay still, in that dawn, that little moment of pause before the day's heat began to burn the world. The Persian wheel well was creaking wearily. The little round leaves on the higher branches of the great trees were motionless, heavy with dust, those little sensitive hair-trigger leaves so

quick to tremble. I began grimly to gather together my consciousness, by sheer force of will to assemble my power of living, to resign myself in some Christian manner to the day—to enjoy it was beyond my ambition. Thought by thought it came to me. I must interview the man who wanted to marry the compounder. I must reassure, if I could, the little patient who screamed at the sight of any of us, because when her broken leg, badly set, had grown crooked, the village butcher, used to breaking bones with a maul, had of his kindness broken her leg, without an anæsthetic, to make it grow straight. I must be present when Mrs. Rallia Ram dressed the burnt body of the old woman, to quiet the ward sickened by her moanings. I wondered who would die of cholera that day. I thought how the babies would whine and fret and cry in the clinic, and how they would smell.

Theodore-Indeed woke suddenly. I closed my eyes to protect myself against the day's immediate beginning. He saw I was asleep, and got up, and began diligently pulling on his white cotton trousers. He tied their red string about his thin little ribs studiously, and then, ready for life, turned to me. He suspected me, I suppose, of pretending, for I felt him come close to me and, bending down, continue to peer at me. Immediately I knew that I must never deceive that sorely puzzled wee lad even in play. I opened my eyes and said good morning.

He was amused by my sudden waking, and sat down on his bed, and smiled at me winningly, his

sweet little mouth pursed up. Why, he desired to know, did I sleep in the heat with so much bedding? I threw back my one thin sheet discreetly and said it was my habit. He saw my nightdress, and his eyes twinkled. Why, I was absolutely wrapped up in things, he commented. And then he watched me gathering my old thin dressing-gown about me, and sniggered aloud at the thought of so much clothing. The pink garment delighted him. He felt its texture, and guessed that it was a sort of veil for white women. Its purpose would be to cover my nakedness, he conjectured. I agreed. His amused interest he then concentrated upon the battered straw slippers into which I was thrusting my feet. He remarked cheerfully that they seemed cheap. I replied that that was their chief excellence. He assured me that when he had some money he would buy me a worthy pair from the bazaar, all bright red heavily embroidered with gold, with proper big silky tassels upon them. I thanked him, and wondered where his mother was. He said serenely that she had promised to go for sweets for him at daybreak. He said he was glad he was going to live with me always. He inquired who had protected me by night before he came.

It seemed to me that I must disillusion him at once.

"You are not going to live here with me. You are going back to your father. You came only for the night."

He looked blank. His little face grew serious.

"Is my mother going back with me?"

"I hope so."

"I won't go back without her. I don't like that woman. I won't stay there with my father's woman."

I suppose Taj had taught him to say that, but he spoke sincerely.

"Your father's wife, you mean."

"That woman. She scratches me."

"Nonsense, Theodore! You mustn't say such things. It isn't true. She doesn't scratch you."

The child lifted his hand with dignity and invoked the dawn.

"It being so early in the morning, could I lie to you, Miss Sahib! I don't mean she scratches me with her finger nails. She scratches me with her eyes every time she looks at me, thousands of times, and hard, till I bleed. That's God's truth."

"Well, my lamb, I'm sorry things are so. But we can't help it. It will be all right when your mother is there. You won't be afraid then. Your father misses you, you know."

He wasn't satisfied.

"They make my mother cry," he said. And he sighed. He no longer sat swinging his legs. He got up and walked away from me, with summer languor. "I must go down now, for my morning purpose," he said to me, over his shoulder, from the top of the stairs.

I watched the little troubled lad disappearing.

I had scarcely risen to follow him down, when he reappeared hastily.

"But of course, if you are afraid now in the daylight, I will stay and protect you," he said, earnestly.

"That's very good of you. But I'm going down myself."

The day seemed suddenly lovable. The quality of his tender loyalty shone in it. Meeting Taj, returning from a little shop near at hand with mangoes and injudicious bribing sweets, I told her what her son had said to me. Her eyes filled with tears.

"Ah, so he speaks always to me, my perfect little son! And they take him from me! No woman before had ever a son so thoughtful, from his very babyhood, such a protector. Nursing at my breast, he pondered new kindnesses to me! Miss Sahib, I shall die!"

That afternoon when Fazl Alahi came and told me he had decided to take his wife back, I thought for a moment I had triumphed. But Taj, when she heard his decision, shrieked and moaned and threw herself about. Go to the house where that viper was? Go and watch her husband making love to that woman? Never! She would rather die! The viper wanted only to torment her, to get possession of the lad! I reminded her shortly that she had been weeping quite as violently not long before because she wasn't allowed to live in that better house with the second wife. But she said I had misunderstood her, and hugging her son

passionately to her, refused to go home with her husband. I washed my hands of her and went to the hospital.

Fazl Alahi went away, as I advised. He came back later, about nine, picked up his son and carried him out through the gate. And Taj, hearing the child whimper, grabbed her veil and followed him, sobbing.

"If the doctor had been here, she wouldn't have allowed him to treat me so!" she wailed, leaving me.

I HAD reason about that time, though the *purdah* party was over, to remember the days of my girlhood. Every young and innocent year then there had come a June day when the neighbor's cat got our robins' fledglings. Our dear friends, whose arriving song had been spring and ecstasy to us, whose nest-building had made the apple-trees blossom, our dear friends were suddenly maddened, shrieking, fluttering sick from bough to bough, broken and hurt, and we could do nothing. They didn't want cake. They wouldn't stop for strawberries. Our mother who could mend broken dolls could not console them. Our great strong father with his pockets full of pennies and his mighty arms that lifted us

up toward the sky, couldn't make the babies living again. The cat had got the bird, and into the little girls' hearts had come the shadow of the world's pain. Perhaps the mother bird would forget about it soon, as our elders assured us, but, oh, listen, mother!—She hasn't forgotten it yet!

In the Raja's house, Nur saw fate, like a great black cat, springing hungry for her baby, and her crying made me weep.

"Baby! Baby! Open your eyes! God! Mother, do something! My baby won't open his eyes! O God, Creator, please! *Please!* Little baby! Little baby! Open your mouth! It is your mother! Miss Sahib, can't you make the train come quickly? What time is it? When will the English doctor arrive! The English doctor will give him some medicine! Little sweet baby! God, oh, be merciful to me a sinner! Ah, brother, you help me! Forgive my unkindnesses, brother! Mother, *you* try to make my little baby open his eyes! Why are you weeping, father of this poor little son? There's nothing wrong with our child! The doctor will give him medicine! The doctor will make him look at me! Miss Sahib, isn't there still a book in the hospital that tells you what to do? Make him a little house of glass to keep him living! O God! O God! Please! *Please!*"

For the three days and the three nights since that child's birth the whole family had stood helplessly about trying to comfort its stricken daughter. Nur, that last afternoon, sat in one of those lower

rooms to which the sun never penetrated, holding the child close to her, no veil about her, her hair disheveled and loose, her eyes wildly bright, sunken in great dark hollows, her whole little face darkened with illness and terror. Mrs. Rallia Ram, sympathetic but hopeless, sat next to her, from time to time taking the baby in her arms, trying to feel its pulse, that terrible little discolored dying baby that had really scarcely lived. There was no use of our being there—we could do nothing—but the family had prevailed upon me to write to the civil surgeon, who was returning that day from the hills, to urge him to come at once as soon as he arrived. The Rani, wild with her child's wildness, grieving with her grief, fluttered about, praying and deploring the will of God. The Raja with his own hands fanning his sister from one side and then another, kept comforting her tenderly. "Ah, Nur! Ah, my little sister! Take heart! Don't cry!" Rashid, worn and patient, ordering cooling drinks, casting about in her mind for possible consolations, kept saying; "The baby looks better, sister! Look, he is recovering now!" Bilkis went about quieting her neglected children and reminding Nur how they had recovered from convulsions and pneumonia. I looked at my watch and wiped my eyes. For Nur kept crying, as the beast sprang, "Mother! Mother! God! O God, *please!*" And Mrs. Rallia Ram whispered to me, "Unless he arrives soon ——"

Finally a servant came running in. The Doctor Sahib's trap was coming down the road. It was

stopping at the end of the street. He was alighting. He was coming down the narrow lane toward the house. The Raja, adjusting his turban, went out to meet him.

"Shall I carry the baby," Mrs. Rallia Ram asked the young father, "or will you?" We were to take the child out to the men's apartments, of course. The doctor couldn't come inside the curtain.

Nur cried: "No! Give him to the Miss Sahib! She is to carry him! Then the doctor will make him well, seeing him in *her* arms!" And she was following us. Her mother began calling her back; she went to take her in her arms.

"Let her come with us!" commanded her husband, sharply.

The Rani realized in that moment that she might as well consent. Nur was not to be reasoned with. She was a mother at bay. Rashid quickly took from her head her own veil and threw it around Nur's shoulders. Bilkis seized the outer white cape of the old great-aunt, who among others had been offering her sympathy, and wrapped it about the girl, for she was really scarcely clothed. She had, indeed, the merest sort of bed garments on. And in a moment, with the two women, I was holding out before the doctor that terrible little baby.

The young Scotchman had just suffered from a long hot train journey, and in answer to my letter he had come at that impossible hour of the impossibly hot afternoon to see a dead child. He was polite, but when he saw the baby he gave Mrs.

Rallia Ram a short look as if to say, "You at least might have known enough not to get me out at this hour!" He said shortly that nothing could be done.

Mrs. Rallia Ram was hurriedly explaining to him that this family couldn't let the child die without every possible attempt to save him. And then Nur, who from excitement or possibly sheer exhaustion had for the moment subsided, broke forth again. Her cries at first were stifled behind the hood of her cape. They touched even the doctor.

He took the child in his arms and then laid it down in Mrs. Rallia Ram's ample lap and examined it closely. Nur thrust the cape back from her face a little and began praying to him. She pulled it altogether aside and would have thrown herself at his feet. Her husband gathered her up gently. The Raja tried to take her aside. The doctor kept his eyes on the patient, after the first instinctive glance at the woman. He spoke softly to them. The case was really interesting to him.

"God!" screamed Nur. "Oh, Doctor! Please! God will reward you! My little baby, Doctor! Mother! There is nothing wrong with my baby!"

As the doctor sat bending forward over the child, it died.

We were glad then that we had stayed. Nur fainted. Mrs. Rallia Ram helped the men carry her back to her room, and worked over her more than an hour altogether. She regained consciousness, sobbing, and lost it again shrieking, and wailed

with the wailing household, and wanted to die. She held the child close to her and fainted again.

Later in the day, the men, weeping, took advantage of her unconsciousness and carried the little dead bit of her away to the cemetery and covered it from sight.

The twilight that sad day was ominous. The duststorm it was portending roared down upon the compound at nine. I retreated to the pitch-dark bungalow and defended myself behind ineffectual closed doors. I emerged at ten, when it had subsided, and went with my Indian chaperone to the roof, to bed. At twelve a second black cyclone drove us inside the house. When the roaring was over and the air clear, we ventured forth again. At four a third fury of tempest attacked us. We escaped to our bedroom and lay down hopelessly in sheets loathsome with the night's layers of grit. I rose early to clean myself from the night, to pack as best I might for my holiday in the hills. At eleven the "rains broke." They say the monsoons "break," I imagine, because their beginning is as if the seas had burst upon you. It was the 17th of July, and from the 20th of February until that morning we had seen no drop of rain. Yet when I went to the train at one o'clock that day, such a flood of rain had fallen that the groom, protesting and demurring, led the horse through water knee-deep in the low ground under the railway bridge. Altogether, that twenty-four hours was a characteristic summer day in the City of Taffeta Trousers.

How could Nur, or anyone else, pull herself together in such weather! When I got back, I found her still sick with grief, yellow and wasted. The Rani received me resentfully. I apologized for my absence, explaining that the mission insisted upon all its women having at least six weeks out of the heat of the plains. She scarcely pretended to forgive me. Nur had needed diversion sorely, she said, wiping her eyes. No one could comfort her. I was to come and stay with her, and take her to my house and to the hospital, and get her books of delight, and show her how to use the picture-taking box her husband had bought for her; I was to make her laugh and smile. "Go up and see how she is sitting there now, muttering to herself in English. She is going mad."

Up there in the favorite veranda she was lying on a bed, reading. She rose with a cry at the sight of me, and, stretching out her arms, embraced me, and resting against me she began to sob.

I said, blithely:

"What book have you here, child?"

"Oh, I read it before, but I didn't know what it meant! Look! it is about"—she had begun speaking quickly in Panjabi, but now she broke into English—"it is about—infand mordalidy." And then, in poignant Panjabi, "That's what they call it in English when your poor little baby dies!"

She handed me the little cheap, wise, pitiful leaflet, written by some down-country reformer, upon whom the hope had dawned of cutting down

the terrific birth-rate and horrible death-rate of babies. It was written in the Indian English that makes the frivolous laugh, but what it said would make a sophisticated bachelor weep. It had stirred Nur to wretched broodings. Perhaps if she had made more progress at school, her son would have lived? Was it ignorance that made babies die? Was it true that if women went too long to school, their babies were not strong? Was it because she hadn't thrown off her veils and gone out in the streets and walked about, taking exercises? Or was it because she was a great sinner, unkind to her mother, disobedient to her brother, scornful of the tradition of the whole family that God had whipped her so?

I gave her what consolation I could. And she, poor child, believed all I said. The battered Rani sat listening eagerly. Bilkis, who was expecting her fourth confinement any day, more grotesquely worn than ever with her burden, her nursing daughter, her fever, Nur's sorrow, and the household's anxiety—poor Bilkis never took her eyes from my face as I talked. Rashid, who went about waiting on the three women and the three children, brought a stool and rested close against me for a little. I told Nur that she must not blame herself for what had happened. Among the wisest people of the world, among those who value children most, it will happen sometimes that a woman must bear her fruit and lose it. Bilkis had never been to school, and she had three babies. And Mrs. Rallia

Ram had been to school for many years and she had seven. And there were very few women in the whole city of Nur's age who hadn't lost a child or two, even with the doctor serving them.

Rashid it was who interrupted me. She gave a great sigh, one of the infinite sighs, and turned her hand palm upward.

"It happens as God wills, sister! What have we to say?"

"Ah, but you are a patient woman, Rashid! You are good and patient before God!" Nur cried to her, passionately. "But I keep thinking of my little baby. Wasn't he a lovely child, Miss Sahib? Do you remember what sweet flower-like little hands he had?"

And they all wept, and said: "Ah, sister, ah, poor child, don't cry!"

I understood it had all to be talked over once. But after a long while I changed the subject firmly. I asked Bilkis how she was, and she made a little bitter grimace and shrugged her shoulders. The Rani said that she had warned her that if she let her tender heart grieve too much for Nur, it would not be well with her. So we were back again with Nur. I asked about Akhbar and they began together to tell me how he had wept for his poor little cousin. I asked about Nur's husband and when she intended going home to him. She said she had been there once already since her bereavement, but the house was so lonely without a baby that she had come back to her mother. I asked if

he had his new car. Nur replied indifferently that she didn't know—perhaps by this time he would have got it. So then I waxed surprisingly enthusiastic about cars. They were absorbing possessions, I said. The Rani remarked that they were getting common, though only a little while ago they had seemed such marvels. The common people still believed that the D. C. went to the moon in his car, and came back the same day. But she knew, from what her son-in-law had said, that no one could go so far in a day. I mentioned speed. I enlarged, divertingly, I hoped, upon the glory of rushing about. And all at once I saw a poignant interest flushing Nur's thin little face.

"Ah, Miss Sahib, I'll tell you what sort of car *I* like! If only I could have one of those little motor-cars for babies, that you push them about in with your hands!"

"Ah, dear child, don't cry!" they all said, clicking their teeth against their tongues to show their sympathy.

"God will give you more sons!" said the Rani.

"But it is my own little beautiful son I want!" said Nur.

When I tried to get away from them that day, the Rani's anger broke forth upon me. Suppose I had been away from the hospital for weeks! Was that any reason why I should leave Nur alone, unamused, to brood and go mad? I hadn't even tried to get her to work the picture-drawing box yet!

I sat down again and asked to have the camera brought forth.

"What use is it now to me?" cried Nur, handing it over to me. "It was to get pictures of our little baby that the father of my son bought it for me."

"But look at that!" I retorted, quite rightly. For there was that lovely child Fatma posing, it seemed, for her picture. "Isn't that worth recording?" I asked. She was just learning to stand, and for a moment of adventure she had taken her hand away from the cot leg that had supported her, and was balancing dangerously, clothed only in a sheer little soft white shirt that was pulled up over her tummy so that her little strong pink legs showed, and Akhbar just the second before had thrown onto her curly little head his small red fez so that it sat rakishly over one eye, and her little mouth was pursed up in delight at his antics while she looked demurely out of the corner of her eyes, under those long lashes, at him, gurgling. The women looked at her and murmured and cooed with tenderness, while Nur reached down and seized the child in her arms and kissed her.

"Think how lovely it would have been to have had a picture of that!" we all said, regretting that there were no films.

"I may have some at home," I said. "You come down tomorrow, Nur, and I'll give them to you."

But she murmured excuses. She didn't feel like walking so far. She would send a servant for them.

"You come yourself and bring them," the Rani begged.

I said positively that I would be busy. The next day the Rani sent for Mrs. Rallia Ram. Bilkis's labor had begun, the servant said. It was simply an excuse for getting some diversion for Nur. Bilkis was in no need of professional services. The Rani was unashamed. She did the same thing a few days later. I spoke to her sharply. I told her she must remember that there were other women in greater need of our services. She asked what they mattered when Nur was wasting away before her eyes.

However much time I spent in her house, she chided me for not spending more. We took many pictures of the children that summer, with all the background that the women's quarters afforded, the children at the water jars as the water-carrier filled them from his goat skin, the children with the noseless servant, the children peeking out from behind the blackened pillars, the children in stiff rows in their grandest new garments, the children sitting on a bed with their grandmother—a lovely family group, this one. The Rani had a grandson on each side of her, and her granddaughter in her lap, but she was so securely, so utterly, so regally veiled that not a feature of her face, a hair of her head, could be seen. A mere white cambric ghostly cape, she was, against which the children leaned. But she liked herself extremely in the picture. And I re-

member that as she unveiled herself that morning, after the picture had been taken, Nur, apropos of nothing in the world, said to her:

"Mother, the prophet Jesus *loved* babies."

"Did he, little daughter?" replied the Rani, in the exaggerated tenderness of tone one uses to a sick child.

"They all brought their babies to show to Him," she added.

Bilkis looked at her curiously.

"What did they do that for?" she asked.

Nur said, carelessly: "Oh, that was just the sort of man He was. A dear man, like your favorite uncle that you wanted to show your little baby to."

"Oh! I didn't know that was what He was like," said Bilkis, enlightened.

"Yes," said Nur, turning to other things.

Thinking that over, it seemed to me as fine a tribute to Jesus as I had ever heard from a woman. It was the first time I had realized that of course He didn't say to them that all babies looked alike to Him the first two years of their lives.

But in spite of the pictures, in spite of all the means and precious hours I took to divert her, Nur got thinner and thinner, sinking deeper and deeper into melancholy. And it was natural that in the end it proved to be not our thoughtfulness, not maternal solicitude, not professional skill, that hurled her out of her little stubborn backwater into the current of life again, but rage and fury. It

was anger that made her live again, and a very sad occasion of anger it was, too.

I HAVE tried in this story to avoid dwelling upon those phases of our city's thought liable to evoke the facile scorn of the supercilious. But it would be untrue not to acknowledge that the women of the Raja's house, like all their neighbors, suffered most of the time from fear—which hath torments. Indeed, my limited experience of the earth's surface inclines me to conjecture that most of its illiterate simple folk, whom we, in our more sophisticated emotional exhaustion sometimes condescend to envy, shiver too habitually, tremble too abjectly before the unknown to be deeply comfortable. The fear of ghosts is not among them a frothy conversational first aid. The placation of Deity is not a matter to argue about. The truth, said Jesus, shall make you free. And I have had occasion often to marvel at the power of very little glimmers of truth to work spacious liberations.

These simple women—I insist that in many ways they were simple—had seen, generation after generation, their babies dying of contagious diseases and had brooded tearfully over the cause of it, until, perhaps before Mary bore Jesus, they had seen

a meaning in it. One woman's baby died first. And the empty-armed mother had looked longingly at her neighbor's baby, with envy, with smiting, covetous envy, and it had died, poor little thing, blighted. And the second mother had looked at her friend's baby with eyes too expressive, and that baby had died, withered by the evil eye of sorrow. They had seen this happen through so many centuries that they had come to fear a bereaved mother as western women fear an epidemic of scarlet fever. Don't let her come in the door! Turn your back! Hide the child under your veil! Send her away! Get rid of her! *Ai!* Allah, is she gone? In the name of God, in the name of the Most High, we ward off the blight! They didn't mean to be cruel. It was simply maternal solicitude safeguarding its treasure. If the mourner sat weeping alone, accursed, well—it was her fate to have the evil eye. She must bear it.

But we had repeated earnestly for years that no child, which the doctor attended in a Christian institution or in a Moslem or Hindu house, ever died of evil glances. That seemed to us, when we considered the dozens of reasons every baby seemed to have for not surviving, easy to believe. I don't say we fancied that everyone believed it or that anyone believed it always. Undoubtedly some of our friends believed it sometimes, when it suited them. Moreover, they had had to believe so many incredible things about us, that they found this fact not stranger than the rest. After all, the doctor did

give people babies. She did make the blind to see, by removing cataracts. She did grow new noses upon unfaithful wives. Unveiled, she did bully the town into acknowledging her sort of respectability. All those statements were true. So perhaps it was true that no eye could hurt you unless you feared it. I think it possible that as electricity lightens Japanese nights, although the Japanese neither discovered electricity, nor for themselves worked out its harnessing, so the light of our fearlessness, shining in those women's darkness, showed them that there really had been there no powers to fear. In fact, instead of thinking that it is dangerous for one race to inflict its civilization upon another, I have often conjectured that the mental vigor of any people can be measured by its power of assimilating what it borrows from more progressive nations. Egypt, it seems, expressed herself by what she took from her neighbors. Greece borrowed her codes of laws. Japan borrowed her arts. England evolved herself out of civilizations thrust upon her by Anglo-Saxons and Normans. The United States grows fat upon the inheritance of many nations' experiences. So in the Raja's house, Nur seized upon exotic salvation. Sinking, she laid hold upon our contempt for evil eyes as upon a rope for her rescue. And once ashore, she used it as a scourge for her family.

It happened this way. Bilkis's fourth baby was born when Fatma, the third one, was eleven months old. He lived a feeble week. He did valiantly to

survive so long, considering the summer his mother had endured, the strain of Nur's grief upon her, and the vigor of that little leech, Fatma, who went on devouring her mother's strength with an appetite unabated by any illness, any weather, any catastrophe. Bilkis sorrowed for her child, of course. She sorrowed passionately, yet not as Nur sorrowed. She wept without spirit, bitterly, as if nothing but grief had been her fate. I don't want to misjudge her, but certainly I saw an expression on her face one morning which made me think that she found great satisfaction, in realizing that her lovely baby girl was not to be weaned away from her by any new-born interloper. It was just after she had reminded me, sobbing, that if the doctor had been there the child would not have died, that she suddenly looked at the daughter preying away at her breast, and kissed her almost defiantly. "*You* I shall keep, my jeweled treasure! You I shall keep for my own!" she said.

The next time I happened in at that house, at the very height of the family row, Bilkis was the one I pitied most. She was least able to defend herself. And after all, it was soon after her confinement and she ought to have had a little rest and peace. She lay where she had thrown herself down on a bed, her whole emaciated body shaken by sobs. I went at once to her, and she cried to me, vehemently, incoherently, that she had never said it—never!—she had never even thought it! I can't say how unlovely she looked then, her face so thin

that her ears seemed too large, her hair disheveled, her ghastly yellow face distorted with tears.

That upper courtyard, in the dazzling of the autumn sunlight, was in an uproar. The dozen women gathered for the mourning were protesting and exhorting and quieting each other violently. Nur was behaving most violently of them all. She wouldn't be quiet. She wouldn't listen to the pleading of her troubled mother. No. She would *not* stay in that house to be slandered by a lot of illiterate cousins. The Rani was calling Heaven to witness that no one had ever said such a thing, no one had even dared to think it—it must have been the silly noseless servant who was a fool, or the evil-minded barren daughter-in-law of the cousins. Rashid, not unperturbed, but quieter than the rest, was defending Bilkis. Nur must remember how Bilkis had shared her grief, how she had loved that little baby as if it had been her own. And while I was but beginning to quiet Bilkis, I heard Nur, in a furious climax, cry out that she wished she was a Christian. It was no wonder that the New Testament said that Moslems were devils.

There was a definite gasp of silence, of ominous silence. Nur had gone too far. I said to her, sternly:

"Don't blaspheme my religion! The New Testament says no such thing!"

She cried to me to take her Christian part against them.

"Miss Sahib, it *does* say that! I have read it. It says that Moslems are devils, and I agree!"

"It does not!" I could speak very quietly and be heard, for the women gathering about me had scarcely recovered their speech. "The New Testament does not mention Moslems. Neither does the old."

"Indeed! Why does it not? Why don't they?" The Rani spoke hostilely.

"How could it? Let us all sit down and I will explain to you. Rani Sahib, sit here with me. The Bible could not mention your prophet because he came later, after it was written."

"Oh, your prophet came first, did he!"

"Yes, he did. I'm not saying anything disrespectful of your religion. It's not insulting to Shafi to say he was born after Akhbar. Is it, now?"

She conceded my point grudgingly.

"Our prophet could not mention your prophet because he was not yet born when our prophet Jesus lived. But the prophet Mohammed could mention the prophet Jesus because he came afterward, when people were still talking about him. Nur is mistaken, that's all."

"You wait till I get my New Testament," retorted Nur, starting down the stairs. "I'll show you the very words."

By this time the women were all scolding and growling about Nur's impertinence—"She thinks she knows more than the Miss, even!"—and her im-

pious remarks—"for which may the Most High not curse her too severely"—they prayed in disgust.

But Nur unrepentant came and sat down on the cot beside me, sniffling, and began eagerly turning over the pages of her cheap little text-book Testament. On the bed opposite us sat four women, directly in front among them the old great-aunt, every powerful line of her great dark face saying, sarcastically, "I told you so!" And as Nur went on searching in vain, her sophisticated smile broadened. The others began jeering.

"I can't find it at once, but it is here. Miss Sahib, find for me the letter of the prophet James!"

So, wondering, I found for her the letter of the prophet James. She cast her eye over the first page of it, and cried, vindictively:

"Listen, you all!" Even Rashid, who had been trying to comfort Bilkis, drew near and waited.

"Thou believest that God is one. Thou ——"

The Rani at those words began the creed, in Arabic, devoutly. "There is no God but God," she murmured, and all the women joined her, a fervent murmuring. Nur joined them, but the moment it was over ——

"Thou believest that God is one! Thou doest well!" I had never heard those words read with such finality of scorn. "Listen, now!"

"Thou doest well! The devils also believe, and tremble!"

Nur shut the book. With her little head cocked sidewise, her eyes shining feverishly, she looked

defiantly about the group, from one pair of puzzled eyes to the next. And then she turned to me, and said reproachfully:

"I don't know why you denied it was so written."

The Rani was furiously angry.

"You join with us in the creed—may God forgive you!" And she started again the ominous sentence—There is no God but God! But Nur burst into sobbing.

"Why should I join—boo-hoo—with the devils —who say my eye—*ai*, Allah, how vile they are!— my eye is evil to my brother's son!"

I made them listen to me. I wrote down the date of the Christian year and the date of the Moslem year, and subtracted the centuries. But this didn't really convince anyone but Nur. The others could not read the numbers. And besides, the Rani wasn't sure it was permitted to Moslems to believe such arguments. How could her prophet have been born after mine, when Adam and Eve, as everyone knew, were good Moslems? Nur, moreover, kept protesting with bitter weeping, that the text in question proved that the Moslem creed was taken second hand from fiends.

The hubbub went growling and roaring on. In the midst of it I was inspired. One is, sometimes. I got up to go.

"My religion, Rani Sahib, has been grieviously mishandled. If you will be quiet and listen while I read you what my Book really says about the evil

eye, I will read it. Otherwise I shall now take my departure."

They all began apologizing together. They laid hold of me and made me sit down. It was only Nur, they said.

But I said no! They had all of them—well, I didn't like it! They must be quiet. Nur must stop crying. Bilkis must sit up and listen to me.

They wouldn't have me angry, not for a moment. I kindly let them pacify me. I reached for Nur's Testament and opened it ceremoniously. And then I read words whose meaning had never until that moment occurred to me.

"My Book," I said, "wastes no breath. It speaks and is silent. I will now tell you its final words on this subject, if you care to receive them." I looked at the Rani.

"Read," she said.

It was very quiet.

"Blessed are they who mourn."

It was my turn to shut the Book.

As I did it, I believed, remembering the universality of superstition, that Jesus had uttered those mystic words when He was stirred by some such cruelty as this against Nur.

Blessed are they that mourn, I repeated. I preached them a little sermon, then. Or rather, one of those sermons perfect in beauty which are always waiting to be uttered, came down and spoke itself to the women. They that mourn shall be comforted, it declared, ceasing.

"Ah, they shall not be!" cried Nur. "Do their babies live again to comfort them?"

My words had touched the women very deeply. Few of them, I suppose, had not lost babies. They forgot their anger, remembering their sorrows, and they sighed when Nur burst forth weeping, great unfathomable sighs, and spoke softly to her.

"What wound did ever heal but by degrees!" I said.

"By degrees," they sighed. "Yes, the holy words are true. By degrees wounds heal."

Rashid, I saw then, was standing before me with the most strangely poignant expression upon her sweet face, as if she could burst out into more bitter outcry than them all.

"The very scars of the wounds of the spirit are beautiful," I said looking at her. But I doubted, myself, if such beauty was worth the price paid for it. And Rashid, looking still straight into my eye, shrugged her hands proudly and sighed.

"Ah, my children, dry your tears! You will forget in time!" the old aunt murmured, philosophically.

"We don't want to forget!" moaned Nur. "My little baby was so sweet!"

I drew the two mourners together.

"You must be kind to one another now," I said. "For you have suffered the same loss and you will be regarded with the same dread." They were tearfully reconciled—at least outwardly—and they both clung to me, begging me to stay with them.

When I did go, Nur followed me as far as the last curtain permitted.

"Good-by!" she said. "I'm going home. I can't stand this house longer. Maybe Bilkis tries not to think hard of me. But it is her home—her benighted village life that compels her to. I don't want to make the poor thing unhappier than she is. I'm going home."

"When is he coming for you?"

"Alas! I cannot say. He started to come in his car. But it is a strange machine, and stubborn. Sometimes it moves. But oftener it stands still."

"You will drive back with him?"

"Me? I shall not! I only want to get to my house and close my door and weep alone!"

I was puzzled to know what to say to her for a moment. And then I put my hands on her thin little shoulders and held her away from me, looking at her closely.

"*Nur!*" I said, in a most mysterious voice, "*You have got to be careful!*"

She started. She looked around fearfully.

"Why? You frighten me!"

"While you sit weeping, your husband will be driving about in his new car!"

"Well, what of it!"

"*He won't be driving alone!*"

"What do you mean?"

"He'll get another wife who likes driving about."

Nur spoke scornfully.

"Not he! He is as good as an Englishman! He

hates polygamy. He says it is a disgrace to us native people."

"That doesn't matter. There's many a man who is a monogamist who won't go driving about in a new car alone."

"You don't mean—white men—of your people!"

"I certainly do."

"My God! I never thought it!"

"It's time you did think about it. When a man gets a new car, he wants a nice cheerful wife to enjoy it with him. And if his wife won't enjoy it——" I paused horribly.

"Then what? What, Miss Sahib!"

I shrugged, and said, simply:

"I can't say what might happen! I wouldn't risk it if I had a husband."

"God Most High! What would you do?"

It had been a woman like myself who had taught Nur to read and to write and to multiply and divide. That I wasn't infallible never entered her loyal mind. If by following our advice great long problems in fractions came out correctly, why should she doubt me now? She was staring at me wide-eyed in her desire for instruction.

"I'd go with him. I'd try—I'd try to make other companions superfluous. I'd try to make him laugh when the car stood still. And when he—perhaps got—rather heated, and—said things, I'd sit still as a mouse and not give him advice, nor grumble. I'd get some very nice gay new clothes, and I'd pray God to keep his eyes intent upon me."

"I never knew cars were so dangerous! I never thought of it."

"They're terrible!" I said. "And if he wants to teach you to drive, you must learn."

"Must I?"

"Yes. And if he has to change a tire, you must get out and help."

"Must I?"

"Yes. And you must get some very warm things to wrap up in."

"Must I?"

"Yes."

"What colors?"

"Oh, anything gay and very beautiful. Because when you get away out on the great road you might unveil yourself just a little—you might peek out."

For the first time in weeks Nur laughed.

"I'll peek out! God is my witness that I'll peek out!"

"Remember I warned you! You must be gay! And if you aren't, and he gets tired and leaves you at home to take some one else, don't say to me that I didn't warn you!"

"Oh, Miss Sahib, I never knew this before!"

"Well, you know it now!" I spoke dramatically. "Of course, he may have got some one, meanwhile ——"

"No! he hasn't! Great God! if he has! I hate cars!"

"I've known women," I said, "who drive better than their husbands. I've known men who boasted

that their wives were better drivers than themselves."

"Have you?"

A wicked light came into her eyes. How she would love to have her husband acknowledge that!

"Poor Bilkis," I said, "with no husband of her very own!"

"Ah, poor Bilkis, indeed!" sighed Nur, involuntarily. So I left her.

A few days later, as I was crossing the road under the great trees to enter my gate in the lemon hedge, I saw an old open car disappearing down the road in a great cloud of dust. In the front seat of it with the driver, sat a white cambric ghost. I wondered, and to satisfy my curiosity I crossed the road again and went a few steps down a narrow street to the Raja's house. Yes, the Rani told me, Nur had gone. The Rani seemed baffled by life. She could scarcely believe that she approved of the departure.

"These foreign cars are a great balm to the broken-hearted," she said, somewhat defensively, for there were women about, gathered to mourn Bilkis's baby. "The burden of her grief lightened considerably when her husband arrived."

A tremendously bejeweled woman, thin-lipped and sardonic, answered her. She was the grandmother come to take Bilkis home for a little.

"Doubtless they have power beyond measure. But our grandmothers bore their pains and sorrows without the help of them."

"True enough," said the defeated Rani. Then she added, significantly: "They did so, I judge, because they had no cars, like many of the present generation."

"Cars," I said, "are very good for the health of women. They are increasers of strength. I hope Nur took many warm rugs and quilts, Rani Sahib."

"Oh, many. She followed your advice, and had garments made suitable for such an affair. Of rich colors. I saw it diverted her."

"We shall, of course, again replenish the poor wardrobe of Bilkis, our daughter, when we get her once more with us," said the grandmother.

The question that was disturbing the family then, I gathered, concerned Bilkis's homegoing. I urged it strongly. She protested. She said plague was terrible, always, at that season in her village. The Rani said positively that she could not let all three of the children go. Her heart would fail her, without their sweet company. The grandmother said her heart had often all but stopped beating in its loneliness for those same children. Rashid said nothing.

The grandmother won. She was a rather terrible old woman. I think it possible that until that sharp-eyed creature came to the Raja's house to mourn for the baby, Bilkis's family had never realized her married position. However that may be, the grandmother departed with Bilkis, all the three children, and her son-in-law, the Raja. She couldn't possibly travel with the little ones alone, and it was

imperative that the son who had come with her should return before she was ready, she said.

I SUPPOSE it was about two months before I was again in the Raja's house. I learned then, to my enlightenment, that the Raja was still with Bilkis at her father's house. "They keep him," said the Rani, laconically. The thought that he would be doing his duty there reconciled her to his absence, I gathered.

When the children came back, they were all rounder and brighter. Bilkis seemed to me more hungry-looking than ever. Her eyes turned from loving one child to loving another. Her arms were always tight about her daughter. Her mouth was bitter. Her eyes were sad. They turned more than ever to look sidewise at Rashid, troubled and defeated. I went sometimes to see her because her unhappiness weighed upon me, but I never seemed really to do her any good by my going. The winter passed—my lonely winter without the doctor—and then the rains came and washed the world clear, and the mountains gleamed white on the horizon. There was a day or two of spring, with fresh leaves on the mulberries, and then the grain ripened. It was harvest time and summer. The wheat fields were

sheared of their crop, and on the baked nude earth the sun sizzled. Day by day the doctor's return grew nearer, and the events that make the happy ending of this story of women.

The sorrow of Taj in June came dramatically, even melodramatically, to an end. She had been living through the winter and the spring in the house with her co-wife when she could, and with her brother when family quarrels waxed too furious, sometimes with her son, sometimes deprived of him, coming to me continually and in vain for relief. What no one else could do for her a strange ally, a fearful friend, did for her. Her co-wife died all in an hour of cholera.

A famous Hindustani classic explains on its opening page that one year in Delhi the cholera was so bad that men contracted the disease, sickened, grew worse and died, their families wailed, carried them away to the cemetery, buried them and returned to their homes, "all in forty-five minutes." I have sometimes wondered if the statement wasn't an exaggeration. However that may be, the old cook of the hospital house that summer, sickened at eleven, washing my breakfast dishes, died at four, and was buried at six—that precious old cook whom the first doctor had trained perfectly for all his duties, by means of that famous riding-whip. Fazl Alahi's second wife had been apparently in good health when her husband had left for his office, early in the morning. Theodore-Indeed had been left in the house in her keeping.

His mother had fled earlier in the day to her brother's humble house. It was so poor a place that she had to do her share of the day's work there, and about noon she had been sitting on the floor, still crying over the injustice of the dawn, laboriously turning round the great upper millstone that grinds the wheat small upon the lower one, when in through the doorway stumbled her little son, wild with terror. He threw himself into her arms.

"The woman has given me death!" he sobbed. "Vomiting white, she has killed me!"

Taj told me afterward that at that word "white" she chilled, she shivered, and she froze. The others in the room started up, drew away, and from the doorway cried questions to the child. He was beside himself. He could scarcely speak.

"Dying, she has given me death!" he gasped, and began vomiting.

At this prelude to the end everyone cried to God for mercy. They ran about in noisy excitement, their teeth chattering. The neighbors in the adjoining houses, hearing their terror, babbled out prayers for deliverance. Taj's sister-in-law sent one child running to the hospital, another hurrying to bring the stricken child's father from his office.

I had gone the night before to a neighboring station to a committee meeting. Mrs. Rallia Ram at that hour was attending a confinement case in a village. She got back before I did, early in the afternoon, and hearing that the second wife was

indeed dying, she went at once to the house where the child lay in his mother's arms.

His father was bending over him, white-faced and trembling. He had scarcely got to his other home to see his wife sunken in death when the messenger had arrived telling him the boy had sickened. He had left the wife as she was, and over the child he had stood watching, scarcely seeming to realize what people were saying to him when they told him the wife's brothers were preparing to carry her body away for burial. When Mrs. Rallia Ram came into the courtyard he collapsed altogether. He fell down, and lying in the dust by the bed where Taj sat holding the child, he wept loud and terribly.

Mrs. Rallia Ram said, directly:

"Babu-ji, calm yourself! Taj, my sister, take heart! This is not the disease! This is not cholera!"

But Taj murmured, brokenly:

"Look! He is sinking! His life is going!"

"No! It is not cholera! It is not that look!"

"He vomits that way!"

"Not *that* way!"

"Yes!"

She did what she could for them. She tried to get the man to take courage. When the next paroxysm came, she was convinced she was right.

"This is not cholera!" she said again.

They didn't believe her. "O most merciful God, Thou hast smitten her to hell! Make her plans further miscarry, Oh good God!" Taj sat praying.

She was still praying when I saw her that evening. By that time she was maudlin with fear and anxiety, and Fazl Alahi was wild-eyed. Mrs. Rallia Ram tried again to reassure them. The lad's temperature was high and his breathing was nerve-racking. But malaria alone had often reduced him to such a condition, she reminded them. She expected to hear he was much better in the morning, she said, as we left them.

But in the morning the father appeared at the veranda as I was having my tea, soon after six. His first-born was worse than ever, he told me, wiping his red eyes on the end of his turban. He was delirious now, raving and crying out and dying.

But even I knew, with my little wisdom, almost as soon as I had seen the child, huddled down in his mother's lap, that he wasn't delirious. He was simply shaking and shivering with terror.

"Miss Sahib, make them go way! Don't let them have me! Are they there, by the door, waiting? Miss Sahib, make them go way!" he began as soon as he saw me.

"My son! My lord! There is no danger. See, the Miss Sahib is sitting by you! She won't let anyone hurt you! My dear son, be still!" Taj consoled him.

And I said: "Don't be afraid. There's no one here who can hurt you."

"Out there—they are waiting out there to get me!" he cried.

His father, indeed, was waiting about out there,

because when he had showed his face in the courtyard the child had begun screaming. Taj managed to whisper to me that at dawn, when they had decided to bring him back to die in the house of his ancestors, he had opened his eyes and realized that he was in his father's arms, and gone quite mad with fear. "You explain to him that that viper is dead," she begged me. "I can't make him believe it."

She had deceived the child breath by breath, of course, ever since he could remember, as all those mothers do. But he believed me, so I tried to explain to him that his enemy was now where she couldn't hurt him. But he had often heard his mother say she was dead. She often said she had died. Poor Theodore-Indeed was but a little boy, not able to realize how irrevocable death is. "How is she dead?" he asked me, not with idle curiosity, but as if his whole life depended on my answer. "Where? Why can't she come back? Who is holding her tight?" To calm the child I was driven to dwell upon the starkness of corpses, the depth of graves, the weight of earth. As the day wore on his temperature came up again and he grew drowsy with fever. He passed the night again unconscious, and woke the next morning to terror.

"The child has been all but frightened to death," Mrs. Rallia Ram told me. For her own purpose she had been making inquiries as to what had really happened to him the morning his stepmother had been stricken. The servant and the old aunt, who had been in that house at the time, told varying

stories. But she concluded that there had been a great family row, that Taj had left the house in a rage, and that Fazl Alahi, as he started away to his office, had charged the women to keep the child there till he returned. Theodore-Indeed had probably been crying long and bitterly against what, they acknowledged, had seemed to him imprisonment—he had probably made himself half sick with it—when the women about him had seen death thrust aside the curtain and come stalking in. What they did then, how they cried out, no one will ever know. It is possible that the stepmother, even after she knew she was to die, ordered the servant still to keep the child in the house. But it is difficult for me to believe that, with the very sweat of death on her face, she held the boy tight in her arms. He was too large a child for that, too strong. But that was what Taj believed. And many others found no difficulty in believing it. "That's exactly what she would have done," women said to me afterward who habitually were careful not to speak ill of the dead. Whatever had happened, the child continued so afraid of eating, and so sick, that Mrs. Rallia Ram had him brought to the hospital, where she could feed him by other means, for he grew thinner and more bony and transparent day by day.

Of course the woman's death and the child's illness caused much talk. Many held, some even said staunchly to me, that the dead one had laid a spell upon the child. They said she probably haunted the hospital by night, took out the child's stomach, filled

it with poison, and put it back in again. If only the good old precautions had been taken that ought to be taken in suspicious cases, if only the bones of the woman's feet had been broken before she had been buried—but of course, in the hurry of cholera, and everything, no one had had time to think of that. And I couldn't help feeling that many who pretended to despise superstitions were secretly waiting with great interest to see if we of the hospital were going to be able to save the child from the spell.

We were not impressively successful. Even after he had been there for three weeks, and begun to eat a very little food occasionally, he called to me one morning and whispered into my ear:

"Tell me one thing. If they kick hard, can't they get out?"

"Who?"

"Those dead in the cemetery."

I knew then it was not the women from whom he felt protected by our walls. It was only his father. God, that versatile punisher, was scourging Fazl Alahi with the strangest whip that ever cut the back of a good Moslem. He had divorced his son's mother with a word—that was his right. He had but crooked his finger at her and she had come running eagerly back to him. To reinstate himself with his son he tried every devise known to him, and the result was that the very sight of him made the child physically sick. He howled and he shrieked every time his mother tried to carry him to the gate to see his father, so that Mrs. Rallia Ram told her

she must not do it. She had almost lost patience with the boy. She wondered to me whether the doctor, if she had been there, wouldn't have spanked him. I didn't think she would have. He was too thin. He was like an emaciated victim of tuberculosis, in spite of all attempts to build him up. Taj spent her days telling him what a dear good loving father his was, how never again, never, would he leave his dear son with a scratching woman. The whole desire of her life was to get settled back into her house with her husband.

So they gathered the child up and took him home by force. He proceeded to lose in a week all he had gained in a month. When I went to the hills, Taj and the boy were back again in the hospital, and the father, sick with anxiety, was hanging about the men's gate every evening. I wondered, when I left the city, if the child would be living when I came back. Theodore-Indeed didn't look able to survive many bad days. All that I could say to Taj then was that it wouldn't be many weeks before the doctor got back to her hospital.

I stayed away until the rains were over and the steamy city somewhat dried. As soon as I got back, I began having the rain-melted roofs repaired. I was on the top of our bungalow, inspecting the work of the mud-splashed plasterers one afternoon, when I saw Fazl Alahi coming in at the gate with his son astride his hip, and a servant woman following behind him with a large flat basket balancing on

her head. It was covered, but I guessed it contained an offering of fruit and sweets for me.

I received them on the veranda. Father and son were both deeply content with themselves, for obvious reasons. The father had a normal healthy child again, and the son—I chuckled—had snuggled tight under his chin, a little, living, spotted, unclean puppy! Fazl Alahi almost blushed to see me noticing that dog, the symbol of his utter humiliation. For adult Moslems have no dealings with dogs though young Moslems love them. "It was for the boy—to amuse him!" he murmured. But I knew it had been the ultimate bribe, the last appeal of a defeated man for a child's affection. They presented the unworthy fruit to me, and they blessed me largely—Fazl Alahi at least did—the child had got down to make the puppy run about for my edification. He called me his father and his mother, the British Empire, and the American Mission. He entreated God to reward me for having given him his son a second time—for having snatched him boldly forth when the gates of death had all but closed behind him.

Hercules, too, had done something of that sort, hadn't he, I thought, but not so authentically and melodramatically as I had. It pleased me at that moment to believe all that he said about me, for I was thinking then as always of the doctor's return. She would soon discover that her precious hospital had not altogether lost prestige in her absence, since it had saved her child from the evilest possible

spell. I asked him how they had managed to get Theodore so well, and he said that, upon Mrs. Rallia Ram's advice, he had taken a little house down the river, out of the city, where the air was good. And he had flourished greatly there.

Theodore, after I had sufficiently admired the infidel pet, asked solicitously who was protecting me by night on the roof. When they started away, Fazl Alahi put the child across his hip, to carry him. I asked if Theodore couldn't walk, but he said the house was some distance out. He told the servant to pick up the little pup; for it seemed inclined to stay with me. The servant obeyed.

"No!" commanded the Very Gift. "You carry him, father!"

"I won't carry him! The woman will."

"I won't have it!" cried the boy, imperiously. He started to shriek. "You have got to carry him yourself! She isn't good to him!"

I realized then that, though Theodore-Indeed was so gracious to me, with his parents he was really a stern child, not one to allow adults to take liberties with his desires and inclinations. In the future, I saw, he wasn't going to tolerate any lack of respect to his littlest caprice. Fazl Alahi, that chastened man, sighed as the child insisted, and reached for the unclean beast. And out of my gate they went, the child smiling over the man's shoulder to me, and the man, that dignified, impressive, red-bearded gentleman, with his face turned away from the repulsive creature he held at arm's length. The

sight convinced me that all was normal in that family. So I went back to my happy house-cleaning.

In the next few days I had all the doctor's roofs finished, all her walls whitewashed, all her floors scrubbed, all her high small windows washed, all her paths weeded, all her budding chrysanthemums in their pots set in proper rows along the drive, all the calla-lilies placed with their saucers full, where she would alight from her trap, for there exactly had the first doctor decreed that they should flourish. And I waited for the hour of her return, which drew near like a great and unusually reluctant snail.

I was by no means the only one who awaited the doctor with eagerness.

The expectant Rani summoned me. When I entered her house, I found the lower courtyard deserted. "Is there anyone in this house?" I called, heartily, in the way we do in our city, and climbed the stairs, answering the affectionate greeting that came from the sunlight above. "In God's name we receive you! Welcome now in God's name!" they cried to me. The Rani was too weak to rise quickly. Rashid gave me a double shoulder hug. Bilkis was almost painfully glad to see me. Had I been well, they asked, safe from fever? Had I had a pleasant journey about the more distant parts of the universe?

"Would to God I had been with you!" grumbled the Rani. "Allah sends us in this summer steam strong foretastes of hell fire! Look at me! Look at Rashid! Look at Bilkis! My son has suffered

day after day, without any interval of rest, from fever! Is it the Mount of Murree that you have been gadding about on? Or have you been playing your games in the paradise of Simla? My fate it is to be steamed to death in this wretched city!"

I looked about me. Bilkis at the water jars was washing the face of her daughter, and Rashid was coming out of a room with a clean shirt for the child. All of them looked unhappy and unwell, and the Rani was more low-spirited than I had ever seen her before.

"But the summer is over! The seasons have changed! You have come back to your place in the sun. And the air is cool again—at least at nights!" Though I said that, I was carefully turning my chair to protect my back from the sun.

"True. The mountains are again in view, they say."

When she said that, I looked naturally up toward the tower that rose behind her. She saw me looking.

"Go up and see them," she urged. "The view from up there is very fine, they say."

The idea pleased me so much that I climbed the difficult stairs to the little square roof. From there I looked down onto the neighboring houses and across the great stretch of flat roofs to the river, and across the river and its width of shining sand away to the snow-white peaks of the Himalayas which the heat of summer had kept hidden for months. I stood for a minute, wondering over the skill with

which the little houses onto which I looked down, were hidden from my sight, even the most humble of them. And then I turned and climbed cautiously down.

Rashid and Bilkis by this time were ready to sit down with me. Rashid, as I joined her, smiled indulgently at me, at the childishness of my little adventure to the housetop.

"The view is very fine from up there, isn't it?" she asked, willing to have me praise her house. I had to gasp, then, moved suddenly by a fact that familiarity had almost concealed from me, the fact that not one of those three women thought of asking for impossible permission to go up there, even veiled, to see the view that they were proud of. The realization of this strange situation came to me poignantly. But it was no time to mention disturbing topics.

For the Rani was beginning to tell the trouble which she realized only too sorely. She wanted to tell me all the details of her illness, of Bilkis's illness—would the doctor get back in time for her imminent confinement?—of the children's fevers and of Nur's. I wanted to change the subject to something happier. But I didn't succeed brilliantly. And while we were yet talking of Nur, the noseless servant came volubly up the stairs, babbling out the good news! Nur-ul-Nissa was coming home! Tomorrow she would be here! This is the postcard which the master has sent up to you, Rani

Sahib! Your daughter will be in your arms tomorrow!

The Rani, praying to God, took the post-card reverently, pulling herself into a more erect position, and kissed it. She looked lovingly at one side of it, and then at the other. She studied it right side up and wrong side up. The dear thing was sealed from her eyes. She handed it to me.

"You read it!" she commanded.

I obeyed. They were all leaning toward me eagerly, to hear every last drop of news it contained. They looked at one another and sighed their great satisfaction. Rashid reached out and took the card, and endeavored to read it, Bilkis trying to help her. But the writing was much more difficult to read than the print they were accustomed to try. As they began to decipher it the Rani cried to the servant:

"Go for the black doctor woman! Go and bring that Mrs. Rallia Ram doctor here quickly!"

Her tone made the woman start. I spoke hurriedly, for it happened that I had stopped at Mrs. Rallia Ram's house as I came along to the Raja's, because her little boy had been ill. I had left that good mother, worn with the double burden of the hospital and her family, patiently bending over a cooking-place, preparing a broth for her precious invalid. It was unfair of the Rani to summon her so capriciously.

"She won't be able to come, Rani Sahib," I said.

"There's no use sending for her! There is no one ill, now, here, needing her!"

"I want her to come." The Rani spoke shortly. "I must see her at once!"

"Can't I do something for you? Can't I take a message to her when I go back?"

Rashid and Bilkis were listening as the Rani answered, flatly:

"No. For this purpose you are no good. I must see her tonight, if Nur is coming tomorrow!"

"She won't come. Her little boy is ill. She won't leave him."

"Is he dying?"

"No. Thank God, he is better. But she is weary to death."

"I will pay her largely!" cried the Rani to me, and to the servant: "Be off with you! Do what I say! Why do you stand staring there?"

Bilkis made a contemptuous little grimace toward me behind the Rani's back, deprecating her ill-temper, asking me to remember that she had continually to endure it. Rashid shrugged patiently, agreeing with her. They had both lost the gleam of happiness that the news of Nur's coming had brought to their faces. I persisted in being gay. I made gratifying remarks about Fatma's growth and beauty—it was a subject upon which I could wax fervent sincerely. I suppose we hadn't been talking five minutes when the noseless servant, returning, called up the stairs the message I had foretold. Mrs. Rallia Ram, she shouted to the Rani, said she could not come.

The Rani answered her savagely. She looked at me angrily and at the others. And then to my surprise she began to cry. Tears came welling into her eyes. She covered her face with her veil and sobbed.

"O God Most High! Everything is against me! It is my fate! I am a great sinner!"

I was touched by the sight, for she was an old woman and ill.

"Why are you crying?" I asked. "What's the trouble? If you are really ill, she will come as soon as she can. Shall I—do something about it?"

"It is for my little child that I am weeping! It is for my daughter, Nur-ul-Nissa! Ah, my poor lamb!" she wailed, almost as if she was at a mourning.

"What's wrong with Nur?" I asked, eagerly. "Is she ill? Is ——" The terrible thought came to my mind. "Her husband—isn't—divorcing her?" I was sorry I had asked that. "Isn't she happy?" I added, hurriedly.

"Oh yes!" moaned the Rani. "She's happy, may God forgive her! And it is you who have made her happy in her sins! She ought to be grieving, to be humbling herself before God! Praying for mercy! And she trifles and fools about lightly, having no sons!—having no Hope! Not caring that she has none! I sent for that good native woman, that good doctor who is black, and has understanding of these things! She won't come! It is my fate! Oh, Miss Sahib, don't you remember! Didn't I let

Rashid go to you—to your very hospital when you asked me, that time? If you would but listen to me now! If you would but grant my prayer!"

"What is it I can do for you?"

"Nur will be running to you—to the hospital—as soon as she gets here. Pursuade her! Capture her, now, while she is young, before she is discarded barren! The doctor returning will be fresh in strength and mighty in skill! Make Nur go to her now, before it is too late!"

I glanced at Rashid and Bilkis. They were both looking distressed.

"He is, then—her husband—making another marriage?"

"Not that I know of! Not yet! That's the worst of it! She trusts him, the poor foolish child! So young, she is, my little love, and so headstrong and foolish! Like a baby she believes in him, in his protestations! I shall die knowing she will be discarded. It is a nightmare hanging over me by day as well as night!"

Rashid, who knew that curse so well, wiped her eyes and tried not to cry. Looking at her, I wanted to say:

"Your son, Rani Sahib, hasn't discarded his barren wife!" But how could I say it with Bilkis sitting there bitterly! I tried to comfort the Rani. But she answered me pitifully:

"Ah, don't make comfort where there is no comfort! Look! I beg you when you see Nur not to comfort her! Frighten her, in God's name! Ah,

would that your understanding were equal to your influence! I implore you not to say to her that it doesn't matter! Tell her books are vain! It is from you she learned this indifference! She learned from you to say that there are other things in the world for women!" The Rani spit carefully and religiously, to cleanse her mouth of the foul words she had been forced to utter.

I said, grandly:

"Rani Sahib, you do me wrong! Those words that we say—Don't worry! there are other things in the world besides children!—they are a kind of medicine and cure. They act like a charm ought to. If women worry too much, if they grow hysterical morning, noon, and night, they defeat their purpose. It was not until that woman Taj believed us, and stopped worrying, that the power of God worked for her. It is to fulfill my purpose that I tell Nur not to worry. After all, it is but fifteen months since she had a baby. Nothing would please me more than to see her the mother of a family. She would be a good mother. I can't imagine anything more right and natural. And I promise, to console you, that I will talk to her sharply when I see her, at once. I will scold her roundly for having so much fever! There is no excuse for her not taking quinine regularly—a girl who has been at school! And I will order her to consult the doctor—about her general condition and everything. Is the doctor not wise? Have you forgotten our woman Taj, the *babu's* wife!"

"Forgotten her! Ah, God forbid! She is the one star in my darkness!"

"Has not this house the blessing of Heaven on it? Here you sit, surrounded by grandchildren, cursing God and your fate! And here sits this fruitful daughter-in-law, waiting to give you another! And you weep, without faith!"

She was too superstitious not to be moved by my words. She wiped her eyes on her veil, and sniffed.

"It's true, what you say! God forgive me, a sinner! I walk in thick darkness toward my grave. May God have mercy on us! May He steady this burden"—she pointed toward Bilkis—"until the doctor comes!"

We talked of her coming, then. I told them the very train by which she was to arrive. They asked about Taj, and the recovery of her child from the spell—that is, his illness. To divert them I described the new house to which the *babu's* family had gone—not a grand place, at all, but far out of town, on the river bank, with sand in front of it for children to play in, and great piles of fragrant logs beyond it, and then the open country.

They said it was marvelous that the boy had escaped, and I replied that there were many wonderful things going on all around. Miracles, and things like that, I said. And had they heard of the holy man that all the town was talking of, I asked. They inquired eagerly about him.

Bilkis was sitting directly in front of me, on a low bed, with Fatma in her arms. She had on

trousers of red-and-blue changeable taffeta, and the color of them together with her saffron veil made her look a ghastly yellow. She was so thin that her ears seemed too large. There were great dark rings about her sunken eyes, and her mouth was bitter. I couldn't look at her without wanting to make her laugh at least a little. The Rani was half sitting, half lying on a splendid bed. Rashid was sitting on a stool just at my right hand. Akhbar and Shafi, sitting on the floor beyond her, were quarreling over the lacing up of Shafi's new bright yellow English calfskin boots. The women's eyes were intent upon me as I began the story of the holy man who was exciting our city.

Now, a day or two before, this devout man had sat down in the outskirts of the town to meditate upon God, in such holy filth and disarray that the better sort had gone forth to worship him with food and suppliant offerings. And as he sat there, innocently enough, a water main burst in the ground beneath him, and rivers of water issued forth! What could he think but that God had sent fountains to mark the place of his devotions! And gifts and offerings poured down upon him from the hands of the impressed in more and more abundance as the waters flowed faster and faster. For a few hours the city was greatly moved, until the police and the engineer sahib's servants arrived, scoffing and indignant, to repair the damage. Whereupon the base cried louder than ever that they had known all the time that religion was a fraud.

The Rani rose and sat upright.

"Repent you!" she murmured to me fervently. "Repent you such words! What can you expect of leaders of idolaters! Have Hindus a Book! Such are, it may be, their despicable holy men. But with God's folk it is otherwise! Those who worship the prophet are not so deceived. Among us a holy man is a holy man, and God's beloved. In my younger days I knew such a one myself! A man who fasted steadily for two years, without so much as one drop of water, to say nothing of food!"

"O God!" murmured Bilkis, impressed. As the zealous story went on, her innocent eyes remained fixed in wonder upon the Rani. Akhbar meanwhile, leaving Shafi on the floor, had gone close to his mother, to tease Fatma, for a change. She lay placidly nursing, looking at her brother out of the corners of her eyes, now and then stretching out a hand to him, and drawing it away provocatively. I sat watching the children rather than the Rani.

All at once I saw a change of expression come across the face of the boy. He came closer to his sister, his interest fixed upon her mouth. He stood perfectly still, puzzled, considering. Suddenly he cried:

"Mother!"

Bilkis did not answer him.

"Mother!" he repeated, commandingly.

"Be quiet, Akhbar," she said, without looking at him.

"Mother!" he entreated. He went close to her,

put his dirty little hands on her sallow cheeks, and turned her face toward him. "Mother!" he cried, excitedly, as she asked, "What do you want?" "I remember now! When I was little, I used to lie there nursing, as sister does now! Didn't I? I was *your* little baby! I remember now!"

Perhaps when people are mortally stabbed they wince as Bilkis did. I never have been unfortunate enough to see anyone else do what she did then. In one awkward swoop—she was very great with child—she put her daughter down and gathered the boy into her arms.

"Oh, my son!" she cried. "My little son! Promise me that you will *always* remember! Try to remember how I loved you, Akhbar! Promise to try! I won't be here long! You won't forget me ever, Akhbar?"

He was shaking himself loose from the vehemence of her embrace.

"Where are you going, mother?" he asked, curiously.

"I am going to die, son. Promise me you will remember!"

"I won't forget!" he said, proudly. But he drew away from her instinctively. He moved toward Rashid. "I'm a big boy!"

"Shafi, come here! Come here, my little king! Will *you* remember me always, Shafi?"

The Rani said irritably:

"Of course they'll remember! Don't talk nonsense!"

Rashid rose and went down the stairs. Akhbar came near to his mother again, seeing Shafi so kissed.

"He can't remember anything," he assured her. "He hasn't any brains. He can't lace his own boots, even."

Fatma, so suddenly and dramatically dethroned, had begun, naturally, to howl. Bilkis picked her up fervently.

"Ah, this blessed one! This one it is who will remember me always. The daughter will never forget. Or if she does, she will remember when her time of pain comes. 'How was it with the woman who suffered for me?' she will ask. Ah, God Most High, be merciful to my daughter!"

She wept, and the Rani, grumbling, shuffled down the stairs to a quieter place. I protested to Bilkis.

"You listen to me, my little old chum," I began. "You are taking your depression too seriously. You must think of it as—perhaps a part of your condition. A woman told me the other day in the hospital that before her confinements, every time—she had four children—she suffered so from depression for a few days that she was afraid to be left alone even for a little while. It was just—something physical, in her case, as in yours. And she said that afterward she was all right again, and just—very happy with her baby."

Bilkis lifted her tragic eyes and looked hard at me. She smiled slowly. I try not to remember how she smiled. She repeated my words after me:

"Happy with her baby, was she?"

I drew myself together to try again. The bitter contempt of her voice, after all, wasn't meant for me, personally. It was her life that she was cursing. It was her fate.

"Yes," I murmured, "she was happy with her baby. And so will you be soon."

"Happy with her baby, was she?" She was more successful that time. I couldn't answer her. I tried other subjects. It was of no use. And that was the last time I ever saw her. I am glad now that I patted her and kissed her when I left her. She had none of her own people with her.

FINALLY the day came when I stood outwardly unmoved, among the bundle-laden crowd of Indians on the station platform, awaiting the doctor. After gazing for some time down the track, I saw the train on which she was finishing her journey from Philadelphia come minutely into sight beyond the river. She would be standing looking out eagerly at the near wall of rank swamp-grass, and then, in a flash, there would be no wall before her, but under a great dome of sky, a vast extent of sandy river-bed stretching away to the snowy Himalayas glimmering all pink in the sunset. That moment she was all but across the empty channel, she was drawing

near to the stream flowing like a quivering shaded emerald against the ruby-red brick wall. She would be smiling to see her Hindu patients moving up and down the wet river steps under the mighty overhanging boughs, in their saffron veils and sapphire draperies lifting to one another's heads filled brass water jars. She would be thinking which of her friends lived in those square-towered houses that rose veranda above veranda through the poetical blue smoke of the evening's cooking. She had passed that—she was in the city—the train had stopped! The doctor was almost home.

As we left the station she groaned, practically. "Oh, isn't the dust *awful!* You forget the dust, at home!" But to me the streets of the city had never looked of finer gold. It seemed to me then doubtful if there would be in all the world a street of trees more magical than these planted by our river of water. Through their lofty cathedral arches the rosy golden sunshine slid in great transparent swords of light, contending vainly with the clouds of dust rising to the very heads of the homeward multitude. We passed excitedly through curtain after curtain of light, for the doctor, who never drove slowly, had the lines, and the groom with a wide but anxious smile was crying breath by breath, as well he might: "Escape! Get out of the road! Save your lives!" And of those who, having saved their lives, turned to glare at the avoided peril—tall Sikh soldiers in scarlet turbans, hairy voluminous Pathans, tanned and muscular farmers, naked

grass-cutters, rich gentlemen, inky schoolboys,—of all who turned, perhaps half recognized the doctor, and smiled, and beamed and salaamed. In fifteen minutes the news of her arrival would have penetrated every curtained door of the city. "Value your lives! Clear the way!" the groom kept calling, and there was not a path to the left or a byway to the right of that road whose significance we didn't know as we rolled past it. On the left is the brass-workers' bazaar; on the right is the shrine of the holy man whose grave lights are lit on Thursdays at sunset; by taking that lane you come to Taj's house —the little house of her happiness; by this you come to the gate of the enclosure where the pine logs from Cashmere lie in piles of fragrance; there is the rose garden; here is the very same beggar lying where he lay when the doctor left for home. Now we have come to the two-o'clock eucalyptus tree and the lemon hedge—and the very gate of that hedge, where a welcoming little group is waiting ——

The doctor is at home.

No Indian ever sighed more vastly than I sighed with relief when, without scruple or remorse, I dumped the burden of the hospital down upon her. In that hour I was light of heart. I had washed myself clean of responsibility. I didn't care if Moslem meat was stored blunderingly in the Hindu cooking-places. It wasn't my fault if the compounder gave poisonous medicines. I wasn't responsible for operations that proved fatal. It was nothing to me who lived and who died. In her bedroom

I exulted and I gloated, and I unpacked her entrancing, enchanting home frocks for the sheer joy of thinking of nothing more serious than what women were wearing that autumn in Philadelphia. It was no use trying to talk to her. The staff, the hospital had already taken possession of her. On the veranda she was holding an inevitable reception.

At that golden season of the year the dews are very heavy. We slept, that night, in the veranda, with our beds placed so that we could see the dawn come up like thunder, exactly as it does in Mandalay. No importunate friends interrupted us there as we talked the hours away. I dare say she was sleepy, but it had been a long time since I had so sympathetic an ear to talk English to. I told her, among other things, of Bilkis.

"Do these women, when they talk so, know that they are going to die? Or do they die because they talk so?" I asked her.

It was her turn to sigh. Who could blame her if she shrank from taking up her chosen burden!

"Ah, how many times have I told you that I don't know that!" she said.

Less than a week later she came home from the Raja's house at daybreak, and told me that Bilkis had died giving birth to a son. She looked as if she hadn't had a holiday for years. And though she habitually made light of the pains of labor, she covered her haggard face with her hands.

"It was terrible!" she said. "Terrible! And I couldn't really do anything for her!"

They buried Bilkis that afternoon.

Three days later I went to the house for the mourning, to sit for a little among the women who wailed, as a protest against the nature of things. But once there, among them, I couldn't, somehow, protest much. For, after all, Bilkis had been a successful woman, one who had fulfilled to the last pang what all Moslems and—The Lord help us!—many Christians know is the highest function of women. The two clans had gathered so loyally to mourn her, that the whole floor of the upper courtyard was covered with women who, scorning the seats of the happy, sat in the dust. Nur greeted me, coming, as I arrived at the top of the stair, from the room where she had been attending her prostrate mother.

"Ah, God pity you! Your little chum has left you!" and she burst into loud and sincere weeping. And they all wept and cried out with her. Bilkis's sisters and cousins and aunts took Nur's words for an introduction and gathered about me. "This is the friend she told us of!" they said to one another, sobbing. The old great-aunt was doing the honors of the house in place of the Rani. She would have had me sit on a chair, or at least on a stool, but I chose to sit as they sat. She granted me the right, and took up the answer to Nur's greeting for me:

"Yes, O God, she is gone! As a tale that is told she is finished—as a most beautiful tale that is over!" And on she went with her figurative death song, as old almost as this world, attending always

to me. And I felt uneasily that she was guarding me from the womenfolk of the other family. I thought Bilkis's sisters would have liked a word with me alone. There were questions hanging about that they wanted to ask me. One of them, indeed, said, as she went improvising words for the sad-hearted song, "The walls of this house broke her spirit—her spirit that, impoverishing us departed!

I got away as soon as I could, because I didn't want to say anything that might increase the antagonism between the two parties. Strife I knew there must eventually be, for the Raja would never give Bilkis's family the treasure they would be always asking for and would never be able legally to get—her children.

As I went down the stair the noseless servant whispered to me to come with her to the room where the new baby was. Rashid greeted me there—and what a Rashid! Her face was swollen with weeping; her eyes were red with tears. But she was aglow, for all that, with hope, with—something.

"Ah, Miss Sahib, thank God with me! Thank the doctor for sending this woman! Let your eyes look at that! Let them feast on that sight!"

She pointed to Bilkis's death, that small baby, only just then put to the breast of a wet-nurse. They had almost despaired of getting one, but now, thank God!—this was the right woman! With Fatma held fondly astride her hip, Rashid bent down towards the baby.

"Ah, my precious son! See how strong he is!

He is like Fatma! Like Akhbar! Shafi never drank with such force! How you go at it, my little king!" She turned to the servant.

"Go quickly and tell your master that it is well with our little baby!" she said. She turned to me, wiping tears from her eyes, tears of relief.

"Oh, Miss Sahib," she cried, "how great is God!"

I stared at her, hushed. She was seeing visions. Visions of life coming toward her at last—of a home without a snubbing mother-in-law and a pitiful exploited girl—where she and her dear love would live together with their children. She was a mother with a baby of her very own now. Sons would come to her for comfort.

They came while I was yet wondering over her. Akhbar wandered in first, sniffling, and Shafi followed, disconsolate. They looked orphaned. They were bewildered by the rhythmic wailing that had filled their young ears for three days. Akhbar came close to her and she stood patting his head caressingly as she spoke to me of Bilkis.

Shafi, tugging at her veil, interrupted her.

"Mummy!" he began, using the sweetest baby word. He pointed a distrustful little finger at what all three of the children were watching intently, the wet-nurse. "Is that, too, our mother?" he asked. New babies just appear. Do new mothers also arrive vaguely, he seemed to be wondering.

Rashid bent down and gathered the lonely child into her arms, with Fatma, and comforted him.

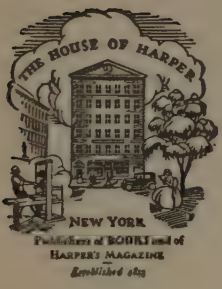
"Ah yes, my son, it is a sort of mother for the

poor little new brother! But why have you not gone out to play! Why are you so unhappy! See, now, you must go out! I will give you some pica, and you shall go to the great bazaar with the servant and buy some new red balls!" She untangled herself from them and took out of the pocket of her shirt some coppers. "Run along now," she cajoled them, kissing their brightening faces, "and be sure to bring back a gift for your sister."

She called a servant to take them out to where their man nurse was. Fatma she gathered into her arms again.

"They are but innocents," she explained to me. "It is not right that their tender hearts should be so dismayed. A few toys will comfort them. They will soon forget and be happy."

THE END


THE HOUSE OF HARPER
NEW YORK

p 57